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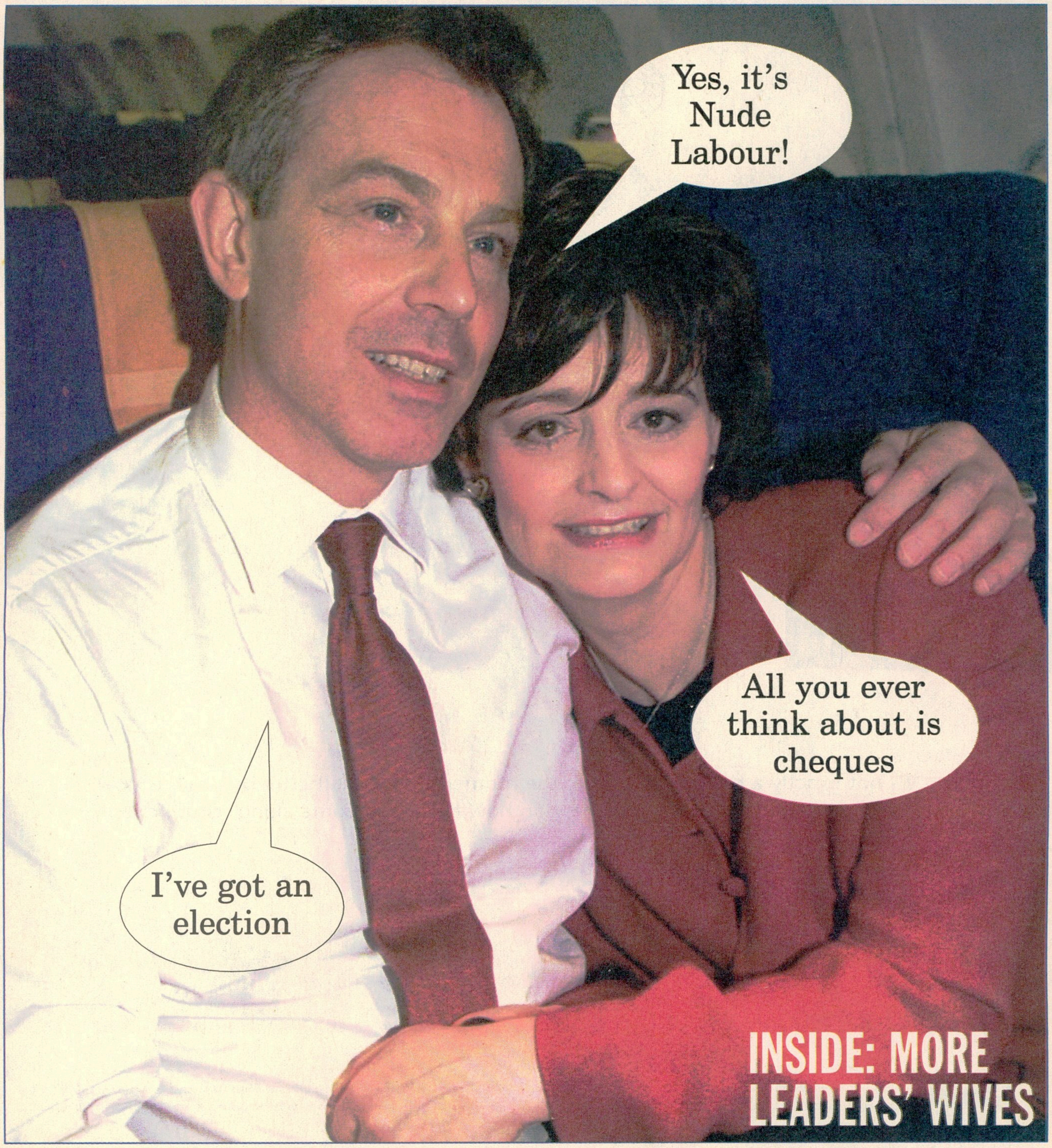

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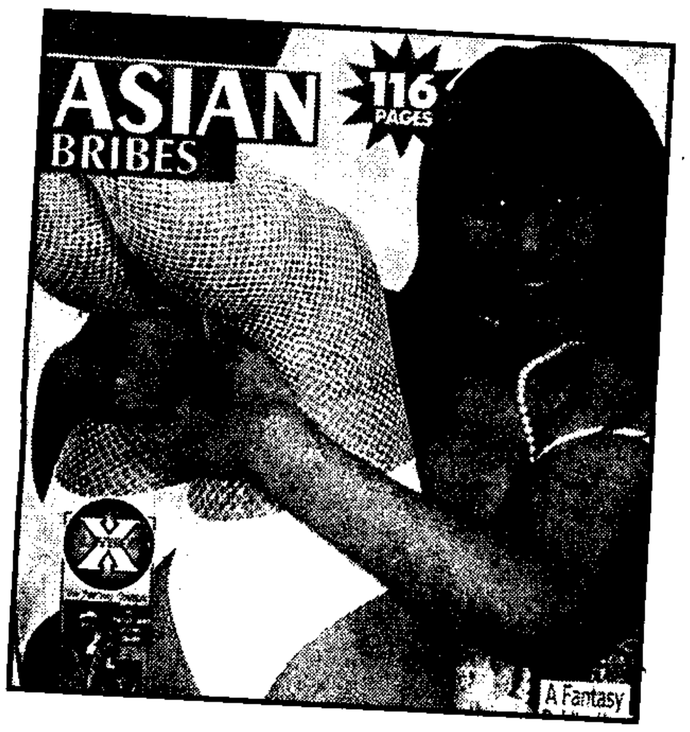

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ABC

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POINTS FAILURE

THE tragic derailment at Potters Bar has served to publicise again the ludicrous system of contracting and sub-contracting vital maintenance work devised by the Tories in the mid-1990s, which the *Eye* has been highlighting since 1995.

Governments have preferred to ignore the situation for seven years. Even after the Hatfield crash, caused by poor track maintenance, "new" Labour declined to legislate for Railtrack to employ a stable and properly trained workforce for all its maintenance. Whatever the cause of the Potters Bar points failure turns out to be, ministers and civil servants must surely understand now that the principle of private contractors competing against each other to cut maintenance costs was one of the most reckless and untenable aspects of the Tories' rail privatisation. Will they take action now?

THE carriage that came to grief at Potters Bar was so solidly built it refused to collapse, despite hurtling along two station platforms.

The train was a Networker, a type designed for mass production to replace all of Britain's slam-door trains. The report on the Clapham Junction accident (*Eyes passim*) set a deadline of 1998 for replacement of those trains, built in the 1950s and 60s and liable to buckle or disintegrate in a serious accident.

The Tories solemnly promised to abide by the deadline. A factory in York invested heavily in Networker production lines but had only just got started when the Tories decided that spending more than £1bn on privatising British Rail was a higher priority than safety. There are still hundreds of slam-door carriages in daily use, and it's just as well for the Conservatives, not to say the injured passengers, that the train involved in last week's accident wasn't one of them.

ONE difference in this disaster is that Railtrack is no longer in thrall to its lawyers and its share price. The days after the Potters Bar derailment have been a far cry from the aftermath of Paddington, when Railtrack and Thames Trains exchanged writs.

After Hatfield, Railtrack under Jonson Cox – who had years of experience in the, er, water industry – and Gerald Corbett (brewing and aggregates) imposed hundreds of draconian speed restrictions, but many were unnecessary.

Under John Armitt, Railtrack's first chief executive with significant railway experience, the company kept a cooler head. Other points were inspected quickly and the trains ran as normal on routes other than the one through Potters Bar. The dilution of inter-organisation blame culture also seemed to benefit the process of clearing up the accident site, with Inspector Knacker soon bundled out of the way.

By letting the Railway Inspectorate investigate immediately and not promising a QC-packed public inquiry (cf Southall and Paddington), there might have been a shift by the government to allow engineers to take precedence over lawyers.

'Dr B. Ching'

"IF you're asking if we are going to sit in moral judgement or political judgement on those who wish to contribute to the Labour party, the answer is no." Thus the disarmingly frank Rt Hon Dr John Reid PC MP last Sunday, confirming what has long been suspected: *anyone* – even drug-dealers or Nazis, presumably – can be assured a warm welcome should they wish to become sponsors or donors.

And he should know. In 1993 John Reid spent three days at a luxury Geneva hotel at the expense of the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, an indicted war criminal. Rather absent-mindedly, he neglected to mention this hospitality in the register of members' interests. When it was finally revealed by the *Sunday Times*, a mere four years later, Reid confessed: "Maybe I have been a mug. I must admit I was bloody wrong and stupid not to have declared the bills. If you ask me did I make a mistake, the answer is yes."

Note, however, that his "mistake" was the failure to declare the hospitality rather than his willingness to accept it in the first place. If that's how he felt about taking money from a mass-murderer, no wonder he seems so puzzled by the fuss about Dirty Des, whose crimes against humanity are limited to publishing porn mags.

FEW Labour MPs are enjoying the scandal of Dirty's Des's £100,000 donation more than Gordon Brown.

From Ecclestone to Mittal, stories about Labour's dubious donors always turn out to involve Tony Blair – and thus emphasise the apparent contrast between the chancellor, that stern pillar of rectitude, and his scruple-free neighbour at No 10. All this will stand Brown in good stead when he runs for the leadership on a "clean hands" ticket after the PM's retirement, endearing him to all those Labour members who are disgusted by the gamey coterie of cronies and squillionaires wooed by Blair.

Brown will also be able to claim that he always knew this love-in with tycoons would end in tears. His lieutenants have carefully kept a video of his interview on *Breakfast With Frost* as long ago as 21 August 1994, soon after Blair became leader, in which Mr Prudence warned that Labour would be tainted if it became reliant on corporate sponsorship. "We don't want to see a system of big donations from individual companies to political parties," he declared.

But, as the Brownies murmur with feigned regret, "Tony wouldn't listen…"

"It'll all end in tiers"

NEWS

JUST six days before the Potters Bar rail crash, Jarvis, the engineering company which holds the £250m contract to maintain the line on which the accident took place, was successfully prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for "unsafe practice during railway maintenance work".

Investigators have blamed the fatal derailment on loose nuts, although it is not yet clear whether these were due to deliberate sabotage or incompetent maintenance. On 4 May Jarvis was fined £7,000 for nearly running over several track workers with an engineering train on the West Coast main line in the Midlands. The HSE's railway inspector, Anthony Woodward, commented: "The company's failure to manage the arrangements properly led to people who were not competent being expected to do jobs they were not able to properly discharge. But for good fortune, this case could have involved a serious injury or fatality." The Potters Bar crash suggests the firm's luck has finally run out.

Jarvis has a long history of accidents. In July 1999 IT was fined £7,000 after a worker lost an eye near Dumfries because it had failed to carry out a proper risk assessment and had too few staff working on the track. A year later Jarvis was fined £500,000 – one of the HSE's largest fines to date – because it "failed to check the track before trains were allowed to run, exposing employees and passengers to risk of injury". This case was launched following two separate train derailments in March and August 1999. On 10 October 2000, just over a week before the Hatfield crash, 41-year-old Mark Meadowcroft was killed by a train while working for Jarvis.

The firm has also performed the extraordinary feat of increasing its number of SPADS (signals passed at danger) to 10 in the latest figures from the Railway Inspectorate, despite the fact that it is not a passenger or freight operator and only runs engineering trains through signals.

The role played by Jarvis at Potters Bar is particularly embarrassing for transport secretary Stephen Byers. His Railtrack replacement, Network Rail, has appointed Jarvis as a "technical adviser" on safety issues. Jarvis is also part of the "Tube Lines" consortium about to take over the running of the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines under Byers's London Underground public private partnership.

IT WAS a big national story when a two-day-old baby was snatched from Wordsley Hospital in the Midlands. The hospital trust apologised and blamed a breakdown in the link connecting CCTV cameras to central security. What didn't make national news was the fact that there was no film to record what the cameras were seeing anyway.

The film had been removed on the orders of Interserve, the private company that took over staffing at Wordsley Hospital last July as part of the notorious PFI deal for Dudley Hospitals. That deal provoked a ten-month industrial dispute last year when staff refused to take part in it. However, since the long-running strike was broken and Interserve took over, the company has been in almost constant dispute with trade unions about staff numbers.

One of the disputes was the management proposal to cut security staff on bank holidays. Unison, the union representing staff at Wordsley, points out that the need for security is as pressing on bank holidays as at any other time, and suggests the real reason for the suggested cut was that the employers are still bound by old agreements to pay staff double time on bank holidays.

FACT TO REMEMBER: Baby Elizabeth Rice was snatched on a bank holiday Monday.

ANOTHER FACT TO REMEMBER: Shares in Interserve surged in March after company results, fuelled mainly by PFI deals, beat all City expectations.

"The editor wants to know if you've finished the '10 Steps To Perfect Health' feature?"

Street Of Shame

WITH the obvious exception of the *Express*, Fleet Street thoroughly enjoyed the story of Dirty Des's donation, not least for the opportunity it provided to list his "adult" mags and TV stations.

There was one other exception, however. Although the *Daily Mail* carried a full-page news story, an editorial and an item by columnist Peter McKay, the word "porn" did not appear once: Desmond was referred to merely as a "media boss" and "*Express* publisher". *Asian Babes* and *Nude Readers' Wives* were not mentioned. MPs' questions about his smut empire – widely quoted elsewhere in the press – were omitted from the story. Even in its editorial, the *Mail* resisted the temptation to take a swipe at the publisher of its mid-market rival, directing its criticism solely at Blair.

The *Mail* had no such inhibitions when Dirty Des bought the *Express*, denouncing him as "Desmond the Degrader", a "pornography baron". But Desmond then counter-attacked with an *Express* series on the murky history of the Harmsworth family, the *Mail*'s proprietors, culminating on 22 February last year with a huge feature on young Jonathan Harmsworth, the current Lord Rothermere: "He preaches about single parents, so why does his own illegitimate son have to live with his mother on the other side of the world?"

It did the trick. Lord Rothermere's wife Claudia was said to be "particularly upset". *Mail* managing director Murdo MacLennan promptly took Dirty Des to lunch at the Howard hotel and begged for a ceasefire, promising that if the *Express* stopped running pieces about Rothermere's love-life the *Mail* would stop referring to Desmond's record as a pornographer.

And so, even though Des's porn empire is of crucial importance to the latest story, the *Mail* dare not inform its readers why there is such a hoo-ha about the PM's association with this "media tycoon" – for fear that the *Express* will once again retaliate by spoiling Lady Rothermere's breakfast.

THE deal struck between the owners of *OK!* and *Hello!* magazines, Richard Desmond and Eduardo Sanchez Junco, to share pictures of the Beckhams' World Cup party, was bad news for the NSPCC.

The Beckhams had hoped to raise £500,000 for the children's charity by selling picture rights to the celebrity-studded bash held at their Hertfordshire mansion. Instead the glossy gossip mags were able to name a lower price which can hardly have covered the costs of the £350,000 party. Proceeds from a charity auction, reportedly £200,000, and any other profits will still go to the NSPCC, but the chief pornographer could have chosen a more charitable moment to call a truce.

THE THINGS THEY SAY

"TONY Blair is infatuated with business. He is in love with tycoons the way teenage girls are in love with boy bands. His love is both undiscriminating and enduring: any businessman, for ever... The highest goal of Mr Blair's government is to do the bidding of the wealthy. So when a businessman comes knocking at the door, New Labour simply ignores the views and interests of everybody else: unions, party members, the voters that elected the government are all outvoted by the voice of a single tycoon. The really corrupt thing about New Labour is that it believes that the only people who matter are the rich and powerful."

— Leader-page article by Simon Hinde published in, er, the *Daily Express* on 19 February 2002.

A STERN editorial on the Richard Desmond affair appeared in Monday's *Independent* under the headline: "Pornography, Politics and the Growing Case for State Funding of Parties."

Political bias in newspapers is one thing, it argued, but "a money donation from a press owner is more suspect... Even more than steering his editors to support Labour, it suggests that Mr Desmond wanted something in return."

Presumably one must assume something similar about the *Indie*'s own proprietor, Independent News & Media – which, as the latest report from the electoral commission reveals, donated £25,000 to Labour last September.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Frank Vanhecke, leader of the Vlaams Blok in neighbouring Belgium..."

— Martin Fletcher, the *Times*, 7 May, p. 6

"...he was determined to put clear water between himself and M Le Pen, Austria's Jorg Haider, Belgium's Vlaams Blok, and the other leaders of Europe's Hard Right."

— Alexandra Blair, the *Times*, 7 May, p. 7

"Mr Fortuyn... had expressed fears for his safety"

— caption, the *Times*, 7 May, p. 7

"I was among the last British journalists to interview Pim Fortuyn, and he gave not the slightest indication of concern for his personal security."

— Alexandra Blair, the *Times*, 7 May, p. 7

CELEBRITY froth journal *heat* won't be winning any prizes for consistency – even if its top man Mark Frith has just taken an editor of the year award for the second time.

In one issue last month it managed to deny rumours that Kate Moss was pregnant while at the same time reporting how delighted she was at being pregnant. Now in the latest issue readers have been treated to a picture of Kylie Minogue in orange trousers and the observation that "Kylie... loves her russet strides almost as much as her boyfriend James."

Er, not so, according to page 33 of the same *heat* where it is revealed that "Kylie... last week confirmed that she has amicably split from model boyfriend James Gooding after a two-and-a-half year relationship." It's going to have to try far harder if it is to replace the *Daily Telegraph* as the celebrity froth journal of record...

FOLLOWING the recent libel case between Colonel Gaddafi's son Saif and the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Grauniad* hack David Leigh denies our suggestion that he was seen consorting with Gaddafi's team at the high court.

How odd. Leigh was clearly observed chatting to Gaddafi's bodyguards and lawyers, and sitting with them in court when the terms of the settlement were read out.

Leigh's insistence that he would never assist foreign dictators in any way is also rather surprising: why, then, did he sign a witness statement for Gaddafi's solicitors back in December 2000?

AS THE *Daily Mirror* enters a price war with the *Sun*, the *Eye* has been alerted to strange goings-on in the *Moron's* circulation department.

In April the *Moron* sent a letter addressed to a Maidstone man thanking him for agreeing to take the paper for a trial period. The letter stated: "Further to your discussions with our telephone canvasser I would like to confirm the following: You have agreed to have the Mirror delivered Monday to Saturday for the next 10 weeks. You will receive a home delivered copy of the Mirror – just 10p per issue for 2 weeks, 20p for 4 weeks, 25p for 4 weeks – SAVING YOU £8.50 OVER THE OFFER PERIOD!"

The only problem is that the man died in June 2001. When his widow visited the local newsagent to ensure that the newspapers were not delivered, she was told that several other customers had been in with similar complaints. A spokesman for the *Moron* told the *Eye* that the company which carries out telephone canvassing on its behalf had spoken to the widow and that she agreed to take the *Mirror* on a trial basis. But if the *Moron* and its subcontractor are telling the truth, why was their letter addressed to the woman's dead husband?

"IT SOUNDS like something out of an Ian Fleming novel," the *Sunday Telegraph* reported excitedly on 5 May. "An Egyptian magnate, a plot to smuggle enriched uranium used in the making of nuclear weapons, and a mystery fax that no one will admit to sending. It is, in fact, just the latest intrigue involving Mohamed Fayed, the owner of Harrods..."

The story – about a fax supposedly addressed to Fayed, which had been found by Portuguese police in the house of a man alleged to be behind an operation to smuggle uranium to Osama Bin Laden – was indeed a mystery. And the greatest mystery was why the *Sunday Telegraph* gave it such space and prominence. As the paper admitted, Fayed had flatly denied knowing any of the people involved, and "investigating authorities have no idea if Mr Fayed knew of the fax's existence, or even if it was sent". Although no fewer than five hacks were put on the case, they turned up nothing new.

Dominic Lawson and Fayed's mutual hatred is well known: Lawson's wife, Rosa Monckton, was one of Princess Diana's best friends, and Fayed has falsely accused the *Sunday Telegraph* editor of being a paid agent for MI6. But was this story good enough to publish?

As the deadline loomed, Lawson became increasingly hysterical. When he noticed a sentence missing from the proof-copy of their article, Lawson screamed at two of the paper's best reporters – Chris Hastings and David Bamber – that they were "fucking moronic cunts".

Meanwhile, Fayed has reacted to the piece by threatening to sue for libel. Whether or not the Fugger has a reputation to defend is, of course, open to question.

THE *Mirror* has been energetic in exposing the abandonment of "final salary" pensions by big firms in favour of cheap and nasty "defined contribution" retirement schemes for their workers.

For months it has highlighted the iniquity of bosses retiring on large pensions of the sort denied to new staff. Just one example was its report on 4 March which, under the headline "Pension fat cats: Exclusive bosses' bumper payouts fuel union outrage", the paper revealed that "while Francis Mackay of catering firm Compass will retire with £1,000 a week, most of his 50,000 staff do not benefit from a final salary scheme."

Funnily enough on 3 May the *Financial Times* reported that Trinity Mirror, owner of the *Mirror*, was considering joining the fat cat rush and axing its own final salary scheme too. But don't worry: on current figures, *Mirror* chief exec Philip Graf would retire on £232,000 a year, while regional newspapers director Stephen Parker would get a comfortable £125,000 annual pension.

FACT TO REMEMBER: Trinity Mirror board member Penny Hughes, currently considering the pension needs of the workforce, is also a member of Tony Blair's secretive "Forward Strategy Unit".

HACKWATCH

Amanda Platell

AFTER Sue MacGregor left the *Today* programme, the *Sunday Times* revealed that Amanda Platell was likely to be her permanent replacement. "The Aussie Platell is a lively lady who is good at broadcasting," it noted. Alas, the story was bollocks.

When Phil Hall announced his departure from the editorship of *Hello!* last month, the *Observer* reported that Amanda Platell had been offered the job. Alas, the story – attributed to "Platell's friends" – was swiftly squelched by Hall himself. "It's nonsense," he told the *Evening Standard*. "In fact, I have been asked to stay on as a consultant, and I happen to think that the appointment will come from within."

Platell's track record might not appeal to many employers. As sidekick to David "Rommel" Montgomery, she served as an airheaded marketing director of the Mirror Group, a disastrous managing editor of the *Indie* and finally as a circulation-shredding editor of the *Sunday Mirror* before even Rommel accepted he'd overpromoted his protégée and showed her the door.

Lord Hollick then gave her a chance to revive the *Sunday Express* – before dumping her as the circulation-collapse accelerated. Next came her surprise appointment as spin-doctor to William Hague, whom she steered skilfully towards last year's catastrophic election defeat.

Since leaving Conservative central office, this Calamity Jane has been reduced to writing a weekly media column for the *New Statesman* – where, despite her own record of failure, she lectures editors and politicians how to "succeed". Unkind *NS* hacks refer to the articles as "Amanda's personal gissa job adverts". At the time of the rumours about her presenting *Today*, for instance, the column included gratuitous flattery for "the programme's female-friendly editor, Rod Liddle". Here are her latest efforts...

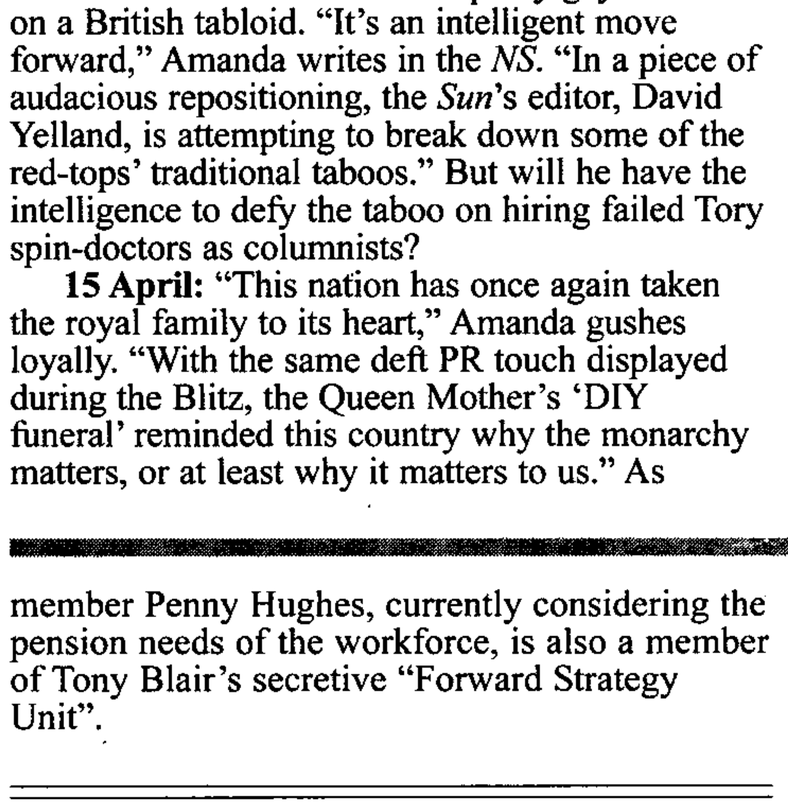
8 April: The *Sun* has invited Andrew Pierce of the *Times* to become the first openly gay columnist on a British tabloid. "It's an intelligent move forward," Amanda writes in the *NS*. "In a piece of audacious repositioning, the *Sun*'s editor, David Yelland, is attempting to break down some of the red-tops' traditional taboos." But will he have the intelligence to defy the taboo on hiring failed Tory spin-doctors as columnists?

15 April: "This nation has once again taken the royal family to its heart," Amanda gushes loyally. "With the same deft PR touch displayed during the Blitz, the Queen Mother's 'DIY funeral' reminded this country why the monarchy matters, or at least why it matters to us." As Amanda has perhaps noticed, the Queen's chief spin-doctor, Simon Walker, is due to leave in the autumn, and no replacement has yet been chosen. So there's still hope...

22 April: Amanda is mightily impressed by Piers Morgan's new, intelligent *Daily Mirror* – "fresh, modern and rather sophisticated" – and by the "stream of top-class writers" he has recruited. There is only one quibble: "It's a shame, though, that when trumpeting his writers Morgan can find only one woman, the columnist Sue Carroll..." Clearly he ought to hire another top-class female without delay. If Amanda has a particular candidate in mind, however, she is too bashful to say so.

28 April: In a lengthy piece for the *Sunday Telegraph*, Amanda offers the Tories the benefit of her talent for spotting political stars: they should ditch the "unelectable" Iain Duncan Smith and replace him with David Davis, whose "courage" and "chiselled good looks" have an irresistible appeal. "As he proved during his tenure running the House of Commons public accounts committee in the Hague years, Davis also knows when to pick a fight and when to hold back, which battles he is likely to win and how to get maximum media coverage for his victories. He is a winner." Gissa job, David! No doubt Amanda hopes Davis has forgotten that only last year she sneered at his demand for loyalty to the new leader, accusing him of having been thoroughly disloyal throughout the Major years and suggesting that "lectures from David Davis to backbenchers about loyalty are about as believable as Myra Hindley lecturing on childcare".

6 May: Amanda is unimpressed by Channel 4's new breakfast show *Ri:se*, which has been billed as TV's answer to the *Sun*. "The only thing this production has in common with Britain's biggest-selling newspaper is a penchant for scantily-clad lovelies. The 'early birds' Edith Bowman, Kirsty Gallacher and Liz Bonnin – all teeth, tight tops and long legs – look like a job lot from central casting." Can this be the same Amanda Platell who, ever since being featured in the TV documentary *Revenge of the Killer Bimbos*, has regularly denounced the tendency to judge hackettes by their looks? Meanwhile, in case *Sun* editor David Yelland missed the hint, she adds a few more: "Unlike the *Sun*, this programme is devoid of wit, meaningful politics, serious sport and recognisable stars." To prove her qualifications as a potential Glenda, she adds that the one saving grace of *Ri:se* is presenter Mark Durden-Smith: "He's warm, almost funny and seriously hunky. In a toss-up between him and Eamonn Holmes, I'd have Mark on the sofa any day." Geddit!?! Won't David Yelland – or *somebody* – give her a job, if only to put *New Statesman* readers out of their misery?



PUBLICITY-shy *Sunday Times* editor John Witherow likes feisty, intelligent hackettes: hence his long-standing admiration for his paper's dashing foreign correspondent Marie Colvin. Lately, however, he has also formed an intense professional respect for the *Sunday Telegraph*'s war reporter Christina Lamb – so much so that he offered her the post of "chief foreign correspondent" if she would defect to the *Sunday Times*.

Since Lamb covers much the same territory as Marie Colvin, she expressed her concern at how Colvin would react to the appointment. Witherow assured her that "I've cleared it with Marie."

Not true, alas. The news was broken to Colvin by another *Sunday Telegraph* hack while she was under siege in Ramallah – whereupon the furious hackette rang Witherow and "gave him an earful".

It now appears Christina Lamb will be staying at the *Telegraph* after all.

English solicitors hope to inspire Ugandan ethics

Law Society Gazette

IN THE TEAROOM

NOW we know that every time we purchase a copy of *Spunk Loving Sluts*, Dirty Des will pass on a fraction of the cover price to help "new" Labour campaign for more rape crisis centres, and that the party's battles against the BNP in Burnley are similarly subsidised by sales of *Asian Babes*, the key, underpinning notion of "the project" becomes clear: whenever politically expedient, hold two contradictory positions at the same time.

Sometimes this requires some nifty semantic footwork, as evident in, say, the non-resignation status of Martin Sixsmith's resignation, or John Reid's insistence that his party does not make "moral" judgements about contributors so long as they share Labour "values".

Nowhere is this studied ambivalence more deftly managed than in the party's approach to the euro. The prime minister allows it to be known that he's broadly in favour of it, but only through various "outriders" – so as not to give Gordon Brown too much leverage.

The euro has to pass 10 essential tests. Five are of a technocratic nature and are being applied by the treasury. Five are fatuous-seeming – though psephologically crucial – questions posed over crisps and cola by Philip Gould in dismal focus-groups around the country. The latter tests are now deemed to be passed and the "yes" campaign can begin even while the government insists that it must await the results of the chancellor's ruminations.

In Peter Hain, a bright and charismatic future prime minister, Blair has found an ideal and persuasive advocate for the euro. He is still saddled, however, with a previous "outrider" in the shape of Stephen Byers. Ask yourself, would you vote for the euro if Stephen Byers was one of its most prominent supporters? Clearly, Byers has become a liability, standing in the way of a successful "yes" campaign. Therefore, he will have to go.

So, though he still drives around in a ministerial car and carries a red box, Byers has already resigned. Or "been resigned". Or whatever.

'Urquhart'

THE draft communications bill "should be broadly welcomed", according to an enthusiastic *Times* editorial last week. "The lifting of barriers to cross-ownership between print and broadcast media will help promote new investment and ideas in the communications industry, to the consumers' benefit." Nowhere in the editorial was there any mention of the man likeliest to benefit from this change – one R. Murdoch.

More surprisingly, even pundits and leader-writers outside the Murdoch stable were sanguine about Tessa Jowell's announcement that the Dirty Digger could at last gain a foothold in terrestrial TV, happily overlooking the absurdity of her claim to be creating "a system that delivers a plurality of owners and a diversity of output".

Could they have been influenced by the opportunity it offers their own proprietors to expand their cross-media interests? (The Guardian Media Group celebrated the relaxation of rules on radio ownership by announcing a £41m bid for Jazz FM.) Or had they swallowed the spin from News International that Rupert is miffed at not being allowed to bid for Carlton or Granada and might not even bother buying little ol' Channel 5? Or did they share the lofty view of *Spectator* columnist Stephen Glover that Channel 5 is such an inconsequential and downmarket station no one cares a fig?

Perhaps Glover and others have forgotten how Murdoch turned round Sky – which was originally even less popular than Channel 5 – with a ferocious and shameless cross-promotional campaign involving all his broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, as recorded in our "Eye-Sky" column. The same tactic, reinforced this time by constant plugging on BskyB channels, could easily succeed again. Given the incompetence of Granada and Carlton, unlikely to improve even if they do merge, who would bet against Channel 5 becoming a major terrestrial network and making vast new profits for Rupert?

Many Labour backbenchers, noting the *Times*'s recent toning down of its hostility to the euro, assume that some sort of bargain must have been struck between Blair and the Digger. Insiders at Channel 5 also mutter about "nods and winks", pointing out that the station has already done a deal to take some of Sky's news service.

Their suspicions are well founded. In the version of the bill agreed by the trade and culture departments last month, which was sent to No 10 for "finishing touches" to be added, the rule preventing Murdoch from acquiring Channel 5 was retained. But when the *Financial Times* revealed the contents of the document on 29 April, it noted presciently that "Downing Street could yet alter the fine print". And so it came to pass.

Although the change was announced in the House by Tessa Jowell, it was entirely Blair's handiwork. To her credit, even when announcing that the proposals were "proprietor-neutral" – ie not tailored with any particular media baron in mind – Jowell somehow managed to keep a straight face.

AS MPs questioned Tessa Jowell last week about the easing of rules on foreigners owning British TV stations, Silvio Berlusconi was mentioned more than once. Jowell probably recognised the name: her husband, David Mills, has been Berlusconi's lawyer for more than 20 years.

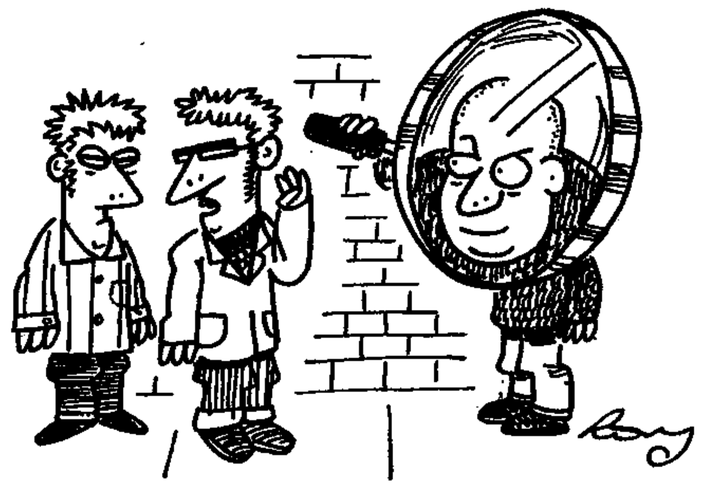
Unsurprisingly, Mills knows a thing or two about media regulation – and how to bypass it. A few years ago, when the Italian government passed a law requiring Berlusconi to scale down his media interests, Mills set up an offshore holding company in the British Virgin Islands on behalf of one of Berlusconi's TV channels. As the *Independent* revealed at the time, since Mills was officially registered as the company's owner, Berlusconi "could legally claim the channel was separate from him".

If the Dirty Digger wishes to find a loophole in the regulations that prevent him from buying ITV, perhaps he too should hire the services of Tessa Jowell's talented husband.

LAST summer Nigel Crisp, chief executive of the National Health Service, floated the idea that "failing" management in NHS hospitals be "franchised" to the private sector.

The idea wasn't well received by health secretary Alan Milburn, whose office insisted that any new management would be maintained "entirely within the NHS family".

On 8 May, however, the department of health spent taxpayers' money on a series of press advertisements headed: FRANCHISES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF NHS HOSPITAL TRUSTS. The ad announced: "Where NHS Trusts fail to reach acceptable standards of performance, the management may be franchised to another NHS organisation or, in future, to individuals or organisations from elsewhere in the public, voluntary or private sector."



"Ignore him. He's just trying to look big"

TONY BLAIR may only be gesturing to *Daily Mail* readers when he proposes to stop child benefit to parents of uncontrollable young criminals, but can he afford to ignore the bad economics of the plan or the strong evidence that it will have no effect on behaviour or crime rates?

A pilot scheme to withhold income support and job seekers' allowance from offenders who breached their probation orders has been running in Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Teeside and the West Midlands since October. Napo, the probation officers' union, has found (after deducting start-up costs) that for each £100 of benefit stopped, the administrative costs to the taxpayer are a staggering £1,000.

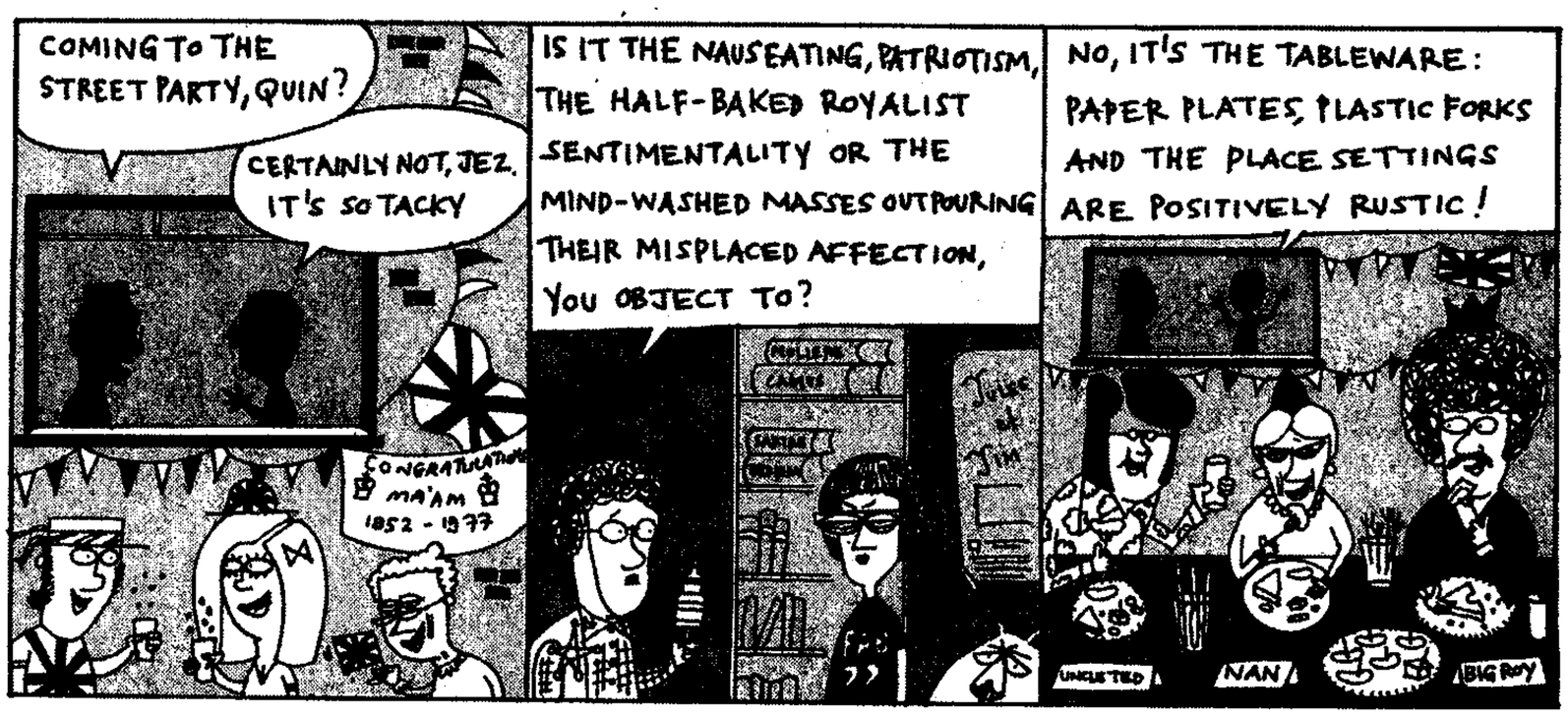
If start up costs are included, the average cost of each £100 benefit sanction escalates to... er... £8,000. Has anyone told Gordon?

IAIN Duncan Smith's failure to take disciplinary action over Tory MP Andrew Hunter's patronage of the extreme right-wing magazine *Right Now!* must have come as a relief to Michael Gove, assistant editor of the *Times*.

Gove has been parading his liberal tendencies in the *Thunderer* of late, arguing in one article that: "The merits of immigration must be made clear to a suspicious electorate." Understandably Gove is keen to play down his appearance just over two years ago at a Christmas reception thrown by *Right Now!* After speaking at the event on the subject of "The Future of the Right", Gove was interviewed by editor Derek Turner for the January 2000 edition of the magazine.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON – 1977

KNIFE & PACKER


COMING TO THE STREET PARTY, QUIN?
CERTAINLY NOT, JEZ. IT'S SO TACKY
CONGRATULATIONS MA'AM 1952 - 1977
IS IT THE NAUSEATING, PATRIOTISM, THE HALF-BAKED ROYALIST SENTIMENTALITY OR THE MIND-WASHED MASSES OUTPOURING THEIR MISPLACED AFFECTION, YOU OBJECT TO?
NO, IT'S THE TABLEWARE: PAPER PLATES, PLASTIC FORKS AND THE PLACE SETTINGS ARE POSITIVELY RUSTIC!
UNCLE TED
NAN
BIG ROY

THE *Eye's* favourite government outsourcing agency Capita is experiencing more problems at the new Criminal Records Bureau (see *Eye 1051*).

The CRB opened in March after a year's delay because of IT problems, but according to the latest issue of *Professional Recruiter* magazine, the bureau is already so overloaded that teachers and nurses with sex offence convictions could soon be working in schools and hospitals.

Under the new system checks on employees working with under-18s or vulnerable adults are supposed to be carried out within three weeks, but the CRB faces a huge backlog. One teacher supply agency, the Supply Desk, has 745 checks outstanding. The company's MD, Stephen Petherbridge wrote to then education secretary David Blunkett in March 2001 to warn of just such a problem.

"There is the potential for the system to grind to a halt as a service currently provided by local education authorities is reduced to one organisation with untested staff," he wrote. "If the advanced checks are not turned around within substantially less than three weeks the knock on effect on the education system will be catastrophic."

This is exactly what has happened, but there was no response from Blunkett. Only after further prompting did his successor Estelle Morris reply, dismissing Petherbridge's concerns and stating: "The Bureau is committed to completing Enhanced Disclosures within three weeks of receiving the application." Unfortunately, where Crapita is concerned commitment is not enough.

● *See Doyle's Disgrace, In the Back, pages 34, 35*

A NATIONAL audit office (NAO) report into the new police radio system, Airwave, provided by BT under a £1.5bn PFI contract (see *Eyes passim*), has described it as "unfortunate" that the other emergency services have not signed up to the same system because of the way in which the bidding process was carried out.

The NAO said procurement had been "hindered by a lack of competition when all but one of the original bidders withdrew" and bemoaned the fact that "the police are not entitled to a share of revenues earned... if additional users do join the Airwave service". Instead any profits will go to O2, a separate company formed when BT demerged its mobile communications business last November.

The report also notes concerns about the level of network coverage, radio interference and dangers to officers' health. Furthermore, the NAO could find no proof that the O2 system represents better value for money than could have been provided by the public sector.

David Varney, the boss of O2, was recently appointed chairman of Prince Charles's "Business in the Community" group, and has spoken about how much business has to offer to society.

"Why Dorian, you haven't changed a bit"

COURT CIRCULAR

THE QUEEN'S decision to exercise the royal prerogative to suppress details of her mother's will was the lesser of two evils. Palace officials agonised over whether to suppress and suffer press rebukes or publish and risk reopening the touchy subject of royal family's private wealth.

Estimates of the size of the will by the media have settled at around £50m but the truth is that no one, not even the Queen as chief beneficiary, has a clue about its real value. Some financial rewards were left to staff but everything else is in the form of property, jewellery and art. The Queen Mother's art collection was extensive, as is her jewellery case which contains inherited gems and presents given from across the world. She also has an big collection of Fabergé objects.

The last inventory of her possessions, about two years ago, put a value on them of £98m. An appended note suggested that value at auction would be higher, for buyers would be impressed by the kudos of owning items once in the possession of the QM. It was knowledge of these estimates that enabled Coutts bank to allow the old queen to continue running an extensive overdraft.

The total household indebtedness to the bank is estimated at £4m, with the Queen Mother's personal account £600,000 in the red – somewhat less than it would have been if the Queen hadn't constantly supported her mother's spendthrift lifestyle by gifts from her private resources. The settlement of the debts is about to be discussed between the royal household and Coutts. Professional advice is being sought on what items might be sold to raise the necessary cash.

'Flunkey'

OLD MACDONALD HAD A TASK FORCE

CABINET office minister Lord (Gus) Macdonald has spent two months reshaping the Better Regulation Taskforce following Chris Haskins' departure from the chair.

The taskforce advises the prime minister on which laws corporations need no longer obey so he can scrap them. So who has Macdonald appointed to this influential body?

Haskins' replacement is David Arculus, chairman of Severn Trent Water. He is well suited to the job. Like Haskins he is a key Labour business backer, signing letters to the press supporting Tony Blair and appearing in Labour's "Business Manifesto". His firm Severn Trent is also one of Labour's "£5,000 or more" donors.

Arculus also knows about irritating regulations. Severn Trent Water has racked up more fines from the Environment Agency than any water firm since privatisation. Though it has recently managed to get down to "Number 14" in the Environment Agency's last "Hall of Shame" of the most-fined firms, with just two penalties, Severn Trent subsidiary Biffa Waste remains in the doghouse. The agency recently warned the firm that it would revoke the licence for its Brookhurstwood Landfill subsidiary in West Sussex because "life for nearby residents has been made a misery because of the smells coming from the site".

Lord Macdonald's other taskforce appointments closely reflect the industries lobbying the government *against* further regulation. Naturally he looked to the City for inspiration: Arculus is a Barclays director; Barbara Thomas is on a few city boards, including Friends Provident, a firm prominent in the old pensions mis-selling scandal which went on to sell hundreds of thousands of "endowment" mortgages that may also fail to make the grade; and Tim Sweeney is the former director general of the British Bankers Association. He spearheaded the bankers' rebellion against possible government intervention and dismissed Gordon Brown's questions over bank profiteering as "routine bank bashing".

Meanwhile supermarket owners are worried about government regulation in planning, employment and nutrition. Consequently Macdonald found a seat on the taskforce for Kevin Hawkins, Safeway's communications boss and a director of the British Retail Consortium. It was the consortium that led the charge against "better regulation" by militantly opposing the minimum wage. Its members also spend a lot of time trying to minimise the impact of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

Some recent exposés of Safeway's practice show why. *Which?* magazine found Safeway's salmon and shrimp paste contained 10 times more mackerel and five times more cod than shrimp. It even had more water in it than shrimp (3 percent), although the supermarket has no plans to relabel it "water paste". Its tuna paste also contained 20 percent cod, and its "chicken and vegetable savoury rice" only had 6 percent vegetables and an unknown quantity of chicken. *Which?* found Safeway chicken had the highest bacteria counts. The FSA recently wrote to both Safeway and the British Retail Consortium warning them about the use of illegal GM maize in tortilla chips.

Macdonald appointed no leading trade union official to the regulation taskforce, but he found room for a former member of the Health and Safety Commission (HSC), Rex Symons. Symons was a CBI nomination for the HSC, with a background in chemical manufacture. Macdonald also found a seat for Michael Gibbons, former communications director for regulated utility Powergen, which was at the centre of the "cash for access" scandal as a client of Derek Draper's lobby firm when Labour was first elected. It now gets the ear of government entirely for free.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON – 2002 KNIFE & PACKER

LOOK AT THESE PEOPLE – THEY'RE JUST CLUELESS!
GOLDEN JUBILEE MY 1952–2002
YES, SWEPT ALONG ON A TIDE OF JINGOISTIC TOSH AND FLAG-WAVING SELF-INDULGENCE
NEVER MIND THAT... CHECK OUT THE REFRESHMENTS: FULL-FAT MILK, COCKTAIL SAUSAGES AND MR KIPLING CAKES
FASCISTS!!!
MILK

TV

Test The Nation (BBC1)
The Experiment (BBC2)

WITH the draft bill on communications due to be published in early May, threatening the BBC with greater regulation, the corporation needed some pretty serious public service type shows in the BBC1 schedules. On the other hand, it would be just too galling to concede space in the ratings war to ITV1 for even a month.

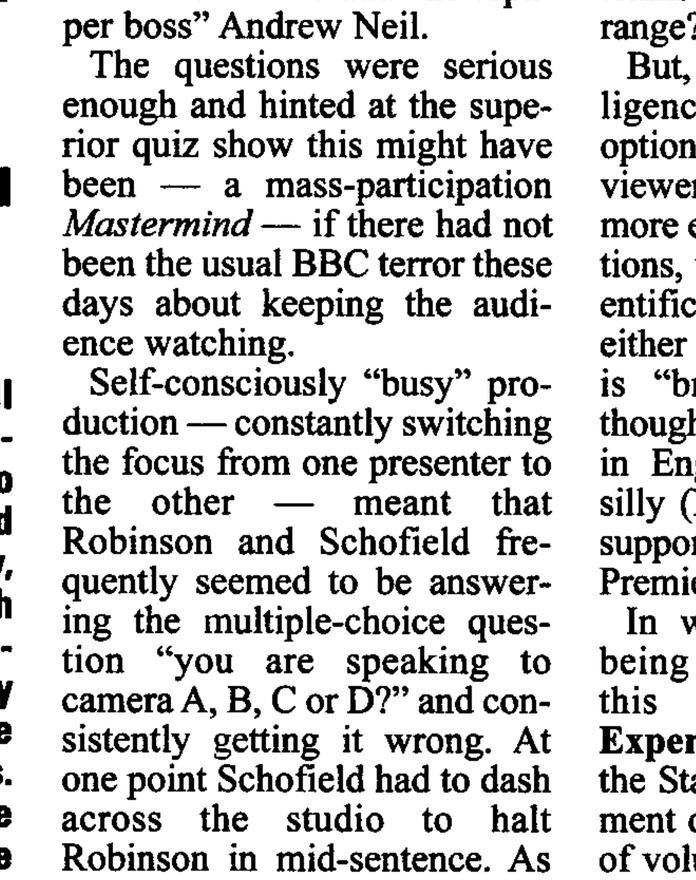
Question: so would it be possible to devise a big vulgar format which could also be claimed to have a social purpose? Answer: **Test The Nation**. On paper, BBC1 seemed to have turned into the education ministry, conducting a nationwide survey to assess the average IQ in Britain and whether some bits of the country were brainier than others.

On screen, though, the paper had turned dismayingly tabloid. In a baying studio Anne Robinson and Phillip Schofield presided over patronisingly designated sets of contestants: Teachers, Builders, Blondes, Publicans, Students, Identical Twins and Celebrities.

You'd probably, though, want to check the Blondes for bottles of dye in their bathroom cabinet because the celebrities certainly weren't natural ones. Given the risk of humiliation in the publicising of your IQ score on live national TV, the only "stars" they were likely to get were the nice-but-dim or the super-vain: a range indeed represented respectively by Ian from *EastEnders* and "newspaper boss" Andrew Neil.

The questions were serious enough and hinted at the superior quiz show this might have been — a mass-participation *Mastermind* — if there had not been the usual BBC terror these days about keeping the audience watching.

Self-consciously "busy" production — constantly switching the focus from one presenter to the other — meant that Robinson and Schofield frequently seemed to be answering the multiple-choice question "you are speaking to camera A, B, C or D?" and consistently getting it wrong. At one point Schofield had to dash across the studio to halt Robinson in mid-sentence. As he moved on, her mike remained open and she could be heard asking plaintively in the background: "Was I not meant to do that?" Such production values insulted the intelligence of the viewer.



The Foresight Saga

So too did the blatant presence of a maximum of two non-white contestants in each group which, given that Identical Twins guaranteed one duo, was pretty lame. Greg Dyke is right that the BBC has a dreadful record on non-white representation on screen but it would surely be better if attempts to address this looked organic rather than the dutiful ticking of a box. Couldn't a couple of teams have had a greater racial range?

But, at every point, this intelligence test took the stupid option. At the end, when many viewers will surely have wanted more explanation of some questions, the hosts shouted out scientific conclusions which were either bogus (the East Midlands is "brighter" than Scotland, though BBC1 has more viewers in England than Scotland) or silly (Nationwide League team supporters are "cleverer" than Premiership fans).

In what is surely far from being a coincidence, BBC2 this week launched **The Experiment**, a recreation of the Stanford University experiment of 1971 in which a group of volunteer guys were divided into prisoners and jailers and confined in a mock-up lock-up. Conclusions were allegedly possible about the effects of power and powerlessness on the human psyche.

Recreated for TV — with a couple of campus shrinks commenting on the action like a Jungian version of Hansen and Lawrenson — what you get is *Big Brother* with a few psychological knobs on. Given that *Test The Nation* is a naked quiz show wearing a statistical fig-leaf, it's pretty clear what the BBC is engaged in an attempt to give populist formats a public service trim.

Executives are playing their own game-show called Beat The Regulator or Dodge The Governors. And how clever is that? Anne Robinson would probably ask. Pretty clever if you're an executive, though, from the other side of the screen, the results look pretty stupid.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Gary Neville Chamberlain

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: An injection of cash given to an ailing business is referred to as a shot into which part of the body?

Contestant: The dark.

Fifteen To One, C4

William G Stewart: Which city in Devon lies at the southern end of the M5 motorway?

Contestant: Southern Yemen.

Family Fortunes, ITV

Les Dennis: Name an excuse that might be given for why a train is late.

Contestant: It's been delayed.

DUMB AUSTRALIA

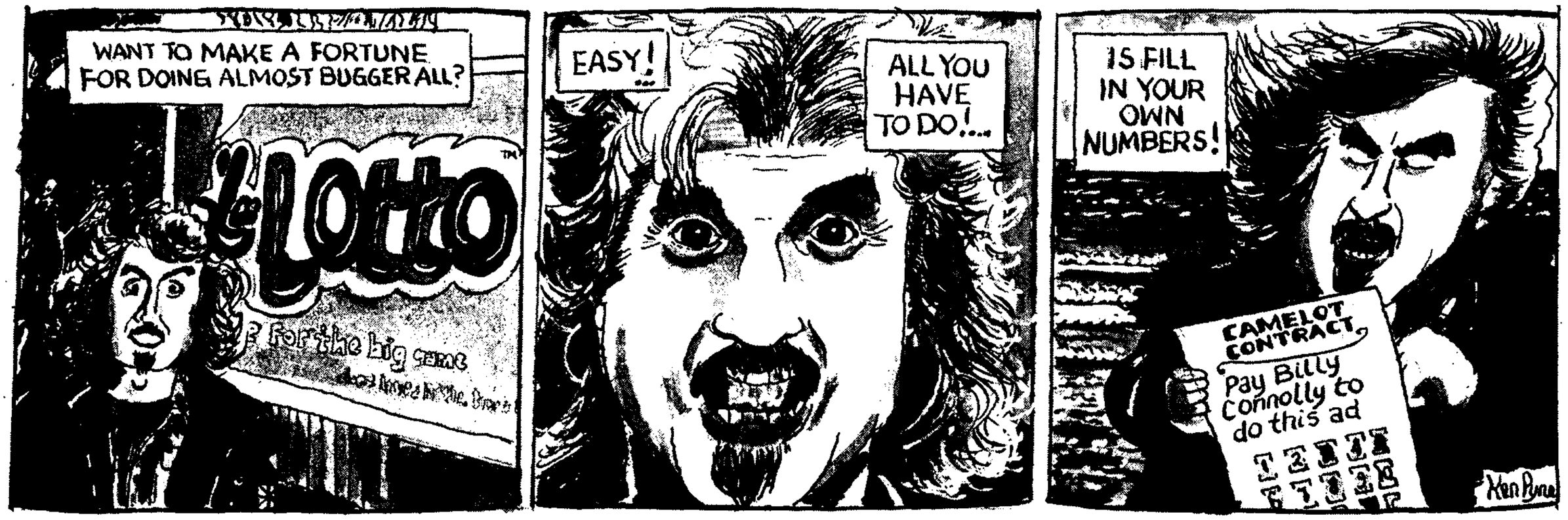
Local radio, Sydney

DJ: For the prize of this AC/DC album, how do you spell "AC/DC"?

Martin from Greenwood: Erm... AD/DC. No... yeah! AD/DC.

★ **WISH YOU WERE HERE...?, 8pm (*not Ulster*)**

Daily Mail


WANT TO MAKE A FORTUNE FOR DOING ALMOST BUGGER ALL?
Lotto
EASY!...
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO!...
IS FILL IN YOUR OWN NUMBERS!
CAMELOT CONTRACT
Pay Billy Connolly to do this ad
Ken Pyne

FOCUS ON GRANADA

ITV, dominated by Granada, has now fallen behind the BBC in popular audience share, seen advertising revenue collapse and its much heralded entry into pay-TV, ITV Digital, stagger into humiliating bankruptcy – leaving nearly 1,500 jobless and furious football club owners throughout the land.

Anyone silly enough to have bought Granada Media shares the day Charlie Allen and his sidekick, Stevie Morrison took over from Robinson have seen more than 60 percent wiped off the price – a staggering £4.3bn of value.

According to ITV insiders, Allen and Morrison now hope the new communications bill will help them get out of the mess. A "merger" with Carlton will save their skins, so they think. Fat chance. Not only will Carlton's Michael Green demand a premium for any deal, but the much heralded "cost savings" may not amount to more than £50m (barely enough to cover the City's "deal fees" alone). And why would shareholders who gave Green and Allen free rein at ITV Digital to such calamitous effect want to see either of them in charge of a combined group?

City gossip is that Allen, Robinson's erstwhile bean counter and now "executive chairman", and "chief executive" Morrison, small time Granada programmer but big time corporate climber, had better start polishing their CVs. Tessa Jowell's new bill, far from allowing them to pursue their cherished merger with Carlton, is likely to see both of them out on their ear when one of the big boys – Disney, Viacom or Bertelsmann – picks up the wreckage of Britain's commercial TV network. It was Allen and Morrison, remember, who wrote to Blair after the election pleading for special protection and whining about the danger of takeover by rapacious foreigners.

Granada used to be run by programme makers who happened to make both good programmes and a great deal of money. Regarded for a long time as one of the best TV companies in the world, it has suffered under the strategic buffoonery of "grinning" Robinson and his two successors in Allen and Morrison.

The spin under Robinson and Allen was that they "saved Granada" when they moved in in the early 1990s. But the TV network was always in good shape – as was the rentals business. It was a disastrous foray into computer services in the 1980s, when the group was headed by Derek Lewis of prison services fame, which brought the group to its knees and Gerry Robinson into the company.

That "upstart caterer" (© John Cleese) rode the economic recovery while branching out into those high tech, high value businesses he knew so well: contract catering and hotels (but what was the logic of buying Forte again?) The TV side boomed, but as Michael Grade presciently said about Robinson and Allen at the time: "They'll be OK while it's successful, but when it goes wrong, as it always does, they won't know how to fix it."

When the downturn hit, it was back to the City's favourite bag of tricks: hive-offs, spin-outs and other pack-shuffling devices to disguise the fact that not much value (other than for bankers, lawyers and accountants, plus a few Granada fat cats) had been created at all.

Now the various chickens have come home to roost; gimmicky ventures like *Granada Men and Motors* and "Ask Jeeves", a worthless internet venture, have been chopped; and despair reigns in Manchester and London, with senior programmers and advertising executives all heading for the exit.

The bean counters have responded with a wage freeze, programme budget cuts of another "£60 million" and a ban on directory inquiry calls, but the executive jet is still rumoured to be in service.

Robinson had the sense to depart with a fistful of options before the shit hit the fan, but – other than asset shuffling – his strategic legacy "Granada Creative" and "Granada Broadcasting" has been exposed for what it was: pseudo-Birtian nonsense. The question now is whether Bertelsmann or Disney will get hold of Granada before Tweedledum and Tweedledummer do any further damage.

GOING LIVE

WHEN the BBC's *Six O'Clock News* went live to Potters Bar railway station on 10 May, as ever reporter Fergus Walsh was almost completely in the dark.

"It's still not clear exactly what happened," he said before trying to tell viewers what happened. "The journey should have taken seven stops…" but "as it approached Potters Bar – that's when things went tragically wrong" – a fact made obvious by the scene behind him. "Experts are still very unclear how this could have happened," he concluded.

in the coffer to finance another rebranding of ITV1 this autumn.

Though £1m, the sum set aside, is negligible for a new logo, it's substantial for a struggling Div 2 side. That said, those unemployed footballers with a sense of humour might smile at the irony of the make-over: the heart graphic that sat beside the letters ITV is to be removed.

THE BBC remains sensitive to criticism of Donal Macintyre, its star undercover reporter whose probing of the model agency Elite ended with licence-payers funding an out of court settlement and who is still involved in court action after Kent police and the *Sunday Telegraph* questioned the accuracy of another of his investigations.

The new series of *Macintyre Investigates* has already bombed in the ratings and been slated by critics. Peter Horrocks, head of current affairs, has now emailed staff warning them not to criticise the show following a newspaper interview with "a senior BBC current affairs figure", who (correctly) identifies *Macintyre Investigates* as "a terrible waste of licence-payers' money".

Horrocks says Greg Dyke "will not tolerate comments in the press by BBC employees which damage the corporation's interest". Quite right, too.

BBC management vigorously deny that the BBC is dumbing down. Interestingly, these heavyweight items were all pencilled in for breakfast "news" in the week beginning 13 May.

Monday 13 May: "Long sport" followed by "*EastEnders*: The return of Patsy Palmer aka Bianca Butcher (reunited with Ricky for a couple of episodes)". Followed by plugs for a new film with Judi Dench and Colin Firth and a new BBC1 drama.

Tuesday: A plug for *The Experiment*, "a major social psychology experiment" by the BBC.

Wednesday: A PR interview with a "science faction writer"; another with Michael Crick plugging his new book on Sir Alex Ferguson.

Thursday: Rosie Millard reporting from Cannes; India Knight in the studio to plug her new book.

Friday: James Galway to plug his latest tour; Daniel Galvin, "hair colourist to the stars", to talk about "hair colour for men". (This at least had a "news" angle: well, it was "pegged to end of Gerhard Schroeder trial: how follicles can play a big role in politics".)

MEDIA NEWS

NO prizes for guessing which of the five bodies due to merge to form the new communications watchdog, Ofcom, views itself as the most important.

The annual report and accounts of the Independent Television Commission for the year ending March 2001 give the game away. The ITC's highest earning director, presumably chief executive Patricia Hodgson, was given a whopping £50,000 pay rise from a salary band of £190,001-195,000 to one of £240,001-245,000. This puts her way ahead of the chiefs of the other four bodies.

The head of the Radio Authority received £153,863 in the comparable period; the director-general of Oftel, £130,000-£135,000; the director of the Broadcasting Standards Commission, £88,182 and the chief executive of the Radiocommunications Agency, £75-£80,000. Perhaps for the remainder of its lifetime the ITC's slogan should be changed to "NOT Putting Viewers First".

THE day after the *Eye* exposed the deal between Labour's Millbank nerve centre and the Beeb's text service CEEFAX not to bother covering the local election results lest they embarrass Tony Blair, there was an urgent u-turn at White City.

Suddenly it was agreed that three sweating hacks would work the 1900 to 0700 shift to carry those results in full…

THERE was a touch of hysteria at the BBC following the death of Christopher Price, suddenly and posthumously heralded as a towering talent.

Price in fact had had a relatively low profile – until it was revealed that "the little known newsreader" (*Guardian*) and "unknown BBC man" (*Sun*) was being paid £250,000 to front a show on BBC Choice.

He was undoubtedly a funny broadcaster and popular with colleagues, but should his death really have knocked *every* other news story off the top of the running order as it did on News 24?

HAVING "outsourced" building maintenance to a firm called Land Securities Trillium, BBC employees are finding that basic overheads for office work can be unsettling.

One "budget holder" was recently charged £21 to have a plug fitted to an electric fan. And a request for framed awards to be hung on a wall resulted – two weeks later – in a visit by an engineer "for costing purposes".

WITH lower league footballers going unpaid and small-town clubs collapsing, you'd imagine ITV doesn't have a penny to spare – if it did, it would surely have honoured its promises and paid its dues. So the unfortunates who've had to hang up their boots up might be intrigued to know that there does appear to be enough cash

"So that's where you've been, Osama"

WORLD CUPBALLS

David Beckham's advertising endorsements are legion, ranging from Brylcreem and Pepsi to a tie-in with Goal-den Wonder crisps. But if it's a stretch to see why a footballer should make you want to eat crisps… what about engine oil? The new face of Castrol is set to be none other than the England captain.

Luckily, Mike Johnson, chief executive of Castrol Asia Pacific, was on hand to clear things up: "David Beckham is one of the most recognised and admired sporting figures in the world, playing one of the most popular games on earth. The combination of Beckham's visibility and leadership in the sporting arena makes a natural fit for Castrol as the world's leading lubricant company." World Cupballs starts here.

DOING THE ROUNDS

Speak out or shut up?

THREE years after whistleblowers told the *Eye* of management failures at Hammersmith hospital leading to multiple errors in the radiology department (*Eye* 977), the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) has found... more management failures leading to more errors, this time in the breast screening service.

As with all CHI reports, the criticism comes long after the event, and the "unacceptable and avoidable" mistakes happen precisely because there is still no independent medical inspectorate with a continual presence in every region, dedicated to supporting whistleblowers, picking up individual errors and ensuring concerns are acted on.

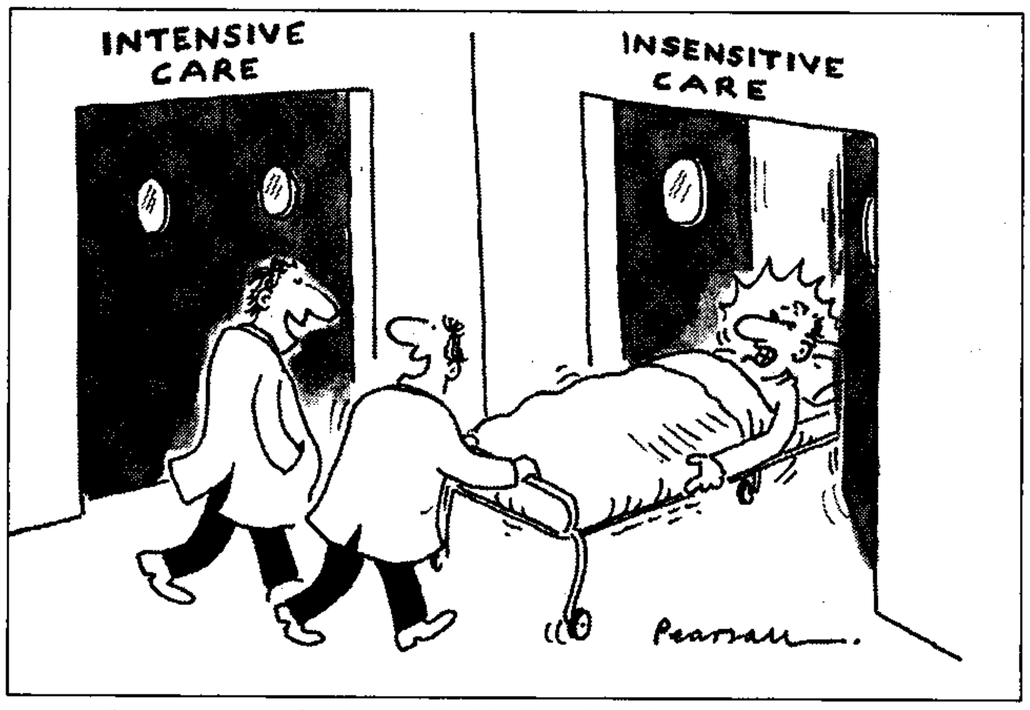
The CHI inspectors noticed that "mistakes have been made in the past but there have been no changes in practice or policy to stop them happening again". But this charge could be levelled at the CHI itself as it has no means of ensuring its recommendations are put into place. CHI also seems to make as many errors as the hospitals it investigates. The breast screening report spelt several doctors names incorrectly and listed Dr Hemingway as being a professor (which she isn't) and a member of the "Imperial College of Radiologists" (which doesn't exist). Consultant radiologist and persecuted whistleblower Peter Dawson found "serious points and names omitted" from the summary of his evidence.

CHI heard allegations from several sources of a non-medical manager at Hammersmith ordering secretaries to make alterations to consultants' professional reports, but this serious patient safety issue was deemed outside the report's remit. The thoroughness of CHI's work was further hampered by its inability to wrestle a copy of the Cameron report, a highly damaging previous Hammersmith inquiry, from the department of health, despite a direct request to Alan Milburn (*Eyes passim*). CHI remains a toothless watchdog that can't stand up to a hypocritically secretive health secretary.

Another key ethos of "the new NHS" is supposed to be a willingness to own up to and learn from errors. But CHI is clearly having difficulty with this and so is the Bristol public inquiry which, as M.D. predicted, was found to have made a serious error in concluding that whistleblower Steve Bolsin would not have been protected under the public interest disclosure act had it been in force when he blew the whistle.

Instead of setting an example by admitting to the mistake, the inquiry team fired off defensive letters to the *Eye* and the charity Public Concern at Work. Indeed, there is no evidence that it has accepted it might be in the wrong.

None of this bodes well for the change in NHS culture that must precede meaningful accountability. On 17 January the government announced a new confidential phone line for NHS staff to report their own, and other people's, cock-ups. But M.D. can find no evidence of it. The department of health still believes that changing the system from the centre can reduce errors, but



what's needed is local, independent scrutiny to make hospitals places that are open to criticism and safe to blow the whistle.

The fact that there are still consultants at the Hammersmith who are frightened to speak out is deeply depressing. One senior source at the DoH has told the *Eye*: "As things stand, my advice to potential whistleblowers would be 'do not open your mouth unless you are absolutely certain of support from line management'. And that's by no means guaranteed, even in the department of health."

He was particularly scathing about the role of the NHS executive's regional offices, which should have been supporting whistleblowers but have been "completely incapable of setting up and managing inquiries into poor clinical performance in the NHS. Their record is one of prevarication, incompetence and downright obstruction in some cases."

So what can a whistleblower expect? "Be prepared to put your entire career in jeopardy and to have to transfer to another hospital even if you are proved right. Rarely are those found guilty ever moved. Make no mistake; careers have been ruined by vindictive clinicians and managers. Your health and that of your family and your relationships with those closest too you will come under enormous strain. Be prepared to be isolated and to lose most of your professional friends." So much for freedom of speech. With Tony Blair banking his career on "saving" the NHS, the outlook looks bleak for whistleblowers.

M.D.

THE WAITING GAME

THE TRUE extent of how hospitals are fiddling waiting lists to meet government targets has been revealed in Bath.

Eye readers will recall how the former chief executive of Bath's Royal United Hospital, Barbara Harris, was headhunted by health supremo Alan Milburn to become director of the NHS leadership centre. This was despite the fact that Ms Harris had left the hospital in chaos and debt (*Eye* 1041).

The commission for health improvement (CHI) criticised the "serious disconnection between the executive team and the rest of the organisation". As if hiding sick patients in ambulances to by-pass the 12-hour trolley wait-limit wasn't ingenious enough, the full extent of Harris's managerial brilliance has been revealed. An independent inquiry into the hospital by NHS South West has revealed evidence of "deliberate falsification of figures".

These include stating publicly that the number of outpatients who had waited 13 weeks or more for an appointment was 122, whereas the actual figure was, er, more than 2,000. The hospital's overspend was reportedly £4m, but the true figure £17m. The review concludes that "chaotic and inadequate systems and inappropriate action, led to the failure to report details accurately". Small wonder Harris resigned from her NHS "leadership" role only a few weeks after it had begun.

She still works on "projects" for the NHS, however, has held on to her £80,000-plus salary and is able to employ a PR firm to denounce the report's findings as "unbalanced, unfair and inaccurate". One might ask how her former health authority bosses in now defunct Avon allowed her to get away with this for so long. It surely had nothing to do with the fact that Avon's director of finance and performance at the time, Paul Nichols, just happens to be Barbara Harris's husband.

DOWN ON THE FARM

OFFICIALS in Mrs Beckett's Department for the Elimination of Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) are certainly tireless in finding new ways to pursue what seems to have become their only policy: to close down British agriculture.

Until now one sector has generally escaped their Blitzkrieg: the country's scores of agricultural shows. But Defra has made up for this with its "animal gatherings (interim measures) order 2002". This ingenious law, which should have been called "the Crap, Piss and Wind Order", lays down that whenever bulls, cows, pigs, llamas or any other animals appearing on a showground discharge their bodily functions, an army of cleaners must rush in with pooper-scoopers to clean up the mess.

All over the country show committees are now looking in horror at the cost of recruiting thousands of extra staff to perform this vital task and wondering how long they can afford to stay in business. The purpose of the edict, Defra solemnly explains, is to "prevent the spread of foot-and-mouth". What it doesn't seem to have noticed is that, according to Defra itself, Britain has now been free of FMD for eight months. Logic suggests that either the risk of FMD no longer exists, in which case this new law is unnecessary. Or there still is a risk of FMD, in which case we should not be having agricultural shows. But logic is scarcely Defra's strong suit. The result may well be that we soon won't have any agricultural shows anyway.

Defra is also under fire for the cunning wheeze it has used to get round its recent humiliation by the House of Lords when peers chucked out its notorious animal health bill. What angered the bill's critics was the unprecedented powers it would have given officials to enter any premises and to kill any animal they wished, while removing from the owner any right to object.

It has now come to light that Defra has craftily got round peers' rejection of the bill simply by introducing many of these powers in the form of a statutory instrument on scrapie and BSE. This passed automatically into law on 19 April without anyone noticing. Its excuse is that it had no option because these regulations came from the EU. But it is certainly an ingenious way to sidestep any tiresome need to consult parliament before bringing in yet another ridiculous and unpopular law.

Meanwhile the arch-bully Lord Whitty, the food and farming minister, has found an equally clever way to avoid having to admit that Maff/Defra did not have the legal power to kill nine million healthy animals last year under its "contiguous cull" policy.

When asked in the Lords for evidence that the cull was legal, he simply stated yet again as an accepted fact that it was. Government whips then ensured that enough sycophantic Labour peers were ready to ask the minister to agree that the Maffia officials had done a superb job to ensure that more informed critics were given no time to point out that Whitty had not answered the question.

The last thing Defra ministers can afford to admit is the truth: that the contiguous cull, although never properly tested in the courts, was a straightforward criminal act committed by a British government on a massive scale.

'Muckspreader'

MAYOR BALLS-UP

SO FAREWELL, then, to Tony's dream of revitalising local democracy with directly-elected mayors who would cut red tape, bang heads together, kick ass and spout clichés up and down the land.

In only 11 of the 28 council areas where the elected mayor idea has been put to a referendum have voters said yes – and in those councils where candidates actually faced the electorate on 2 May, the results were a disaster for Labour.

In **Middlesbrough** former CID chief Ray "Robocop" Mallon trounced Labour candidate Sylvia Connolly, as predicted in *Eye* 1048. In **Hartlepool** Stuart Drummond made a monkey out of Labour's Leo Gillen, a close ally of local MP Peter Mandelson. **North Tyneside** finds itself with a Tory mayor after 28 years of Labour rule; and in **Watford** a Lib Dem has put paid to the hopes of Labour's aptly-named council leader Vince Muspratt.

Oh well, at least the Labour man won in **Lewisham, Doncaster** and **Newham**. Except that in Lewisham it was the "wrong" Labour man, Steve Bullock having seen off arch-Blairite Dave Sullivan in an acrimonious twice-run selection process, while in Doncaster Martin Winter (*Eyes passim*), the man who wants to draw a line under Donnygate, won a resounding mandate from, er, just over 10 percent of the electorate. Only in Newham, where "Sir" Robin Wales consolidated his rule over the East End's one-party state, did things go according to plan.

Almost as soon as results were announced, stories started to appear in the press to the effect that it was probable that local government minister Nick Raynsford would not be forcing reluctant cities such as **Bradford** and **Birmingham** to hold mayoral referendums after all. This, it was said, was because of the danger presented by a resurgent extreme right: look at the BNP in **Burnley**; look at Le Pen. What Labour planners were actually looking at, aghast, was what happens when local people vote freely for local candidates on local issues: crime and corruption in Middlesbrough; financial mismanagement in North Tyneside; and hospital closures in **Wyre Forest**, where Health Concern candidates followed up Dr Richard Taylor's "Save Kidderminster Hospital" general election triumph by seizing control of the district council.

Such results may be a sign of disenchantment with the main political parties, but they are the reverse of apathy. As Malcolm Cooper, vice-chairman of Health Concern, says: "We have demonstrated most openly and forcefully that people power can act to change the face of local democracy." People power? Local democracy? We can't have that! No wonder Tony is appalled.

TAUNTON Deane Council has performed a U-turn on cat pooh.

Somerset County Gazette

BRUM DO

THE 2 May elections piled fresh humiliation upon Dennis "the menace" Minnis (*Eye* 1049), Birmingham council's now ex-cabinet member for housing. Last month the council's 85,000 tenants rejected his plan to sell their homes to a group of housing associations. Now voters in the city's Edgbaston ward have ejected Minnis from the council — the only Labour member to suffer this fate on 2 May.

Not least of the reasons for tenants' unprecedented two-to-one rejection of Minnis's plan was that it involved knocking down about one third of their homes... but without the council actually telling tenants in advance *which* would be selected for the bulldozer.

Next in the firing line may be Minnis's aptly-named former boss, council leader Sir Albert Bore, who clung to his job by just one vote when Labour councillors opposed to the sell-off attempted a coup in October 2000.

● **A POSSIBLE conflict of interest arises at Pembrokeshire county council, where a new cabinet system came into force on 1 May. The "health and well-being" portfolio has gone to Independent Cllr Roy Folland — owner of the county's largest firm of undertakers.**

According to Westminster Council's own 2001 City Survey less than half of us are satisfied that the Tony-led Council offers value for money services – that's 48% against 74% two years ago.

Spotlight, Pimlico Labour Party

TO HULL AND BLACK

HUGE embarrassment in Hull, backyard of the deputy PM, where Labour lost power to the Lib Dems on 2 May after years of incompetence and cronyism.

In the last three years they managed to fritter away a £280m bonanza from the flotation of shares in the city's telecoms company Kingston Communications on grandiose white elephants, such as £44m "super stadium" that only seats 25,000 people, while neglecting to put right boring problems such as Hull's persistence in bumping along at the bottom of national education leagues.

Will Labour learn from its humiliation? Sneaking back after four years in the wilderness comes Prescott's best buddy, Cllr John Black. He was forced out as the council's chair of housing and power behind the throne in 1997 after being slammed by an auditor's report for expenses excesses; for the way preferential treatment was shown to senior party members and their relatives by the housing association he chaired; and amid accusations of threatening behaviour towards other Labour members after a post-election celebration turned into a fracas.

Labour's NEC took such a dim view of Black's shenanigans it suspended him from holding office in the party. In true Labour fashion, the allegations of intimidation have never been investigated. And someone, somewhere, cleared Black for his expected triumphant return to a position of power on the council. This has now been put on hold, alas, while the Lib Dems negotiate the future of the council with a small group of independents — ex-Labour councillors who left the party because of its failure to sort out bent councillors. Perhaps there is a god, after all.

HOW JIM FIXED IT

AT THE beginning of May a public interest report, the result of a two-year, £450,000 investigation into Tory-run Lincolnshire county council by auditors KPMG, concluded that council leader Jim Speechley (*Eye* 1044) had presided over a bullying regime under which council officers worked in a "climate of fear".

Staff were put under "improper pressure" to take unethical and illegal decisions by Speechley and his former deputy, David Mawby. And senior officers who were forced out got huge illegal payoffs to make them go, arranged by Speechley's poodle, former county secretary Peter Burns.

The council's Tory chairwoman Heather Judge said she was "shocked and saddened" by the report. "It is the responsibility of all 77 members of the council to face up to these problems and act decisively," she declared. "I can assure you we will." Just how decisively Lincolnshire's Tories were prepared to act was revealed at their agm last week, when they elected as their leader... Jim Speechley.

● **PITHY verdict on the local election results from deputy PM John Prescott: "Hartlepool is the only town in Britain represented by two monkeys."**

SAUNA OR LATER

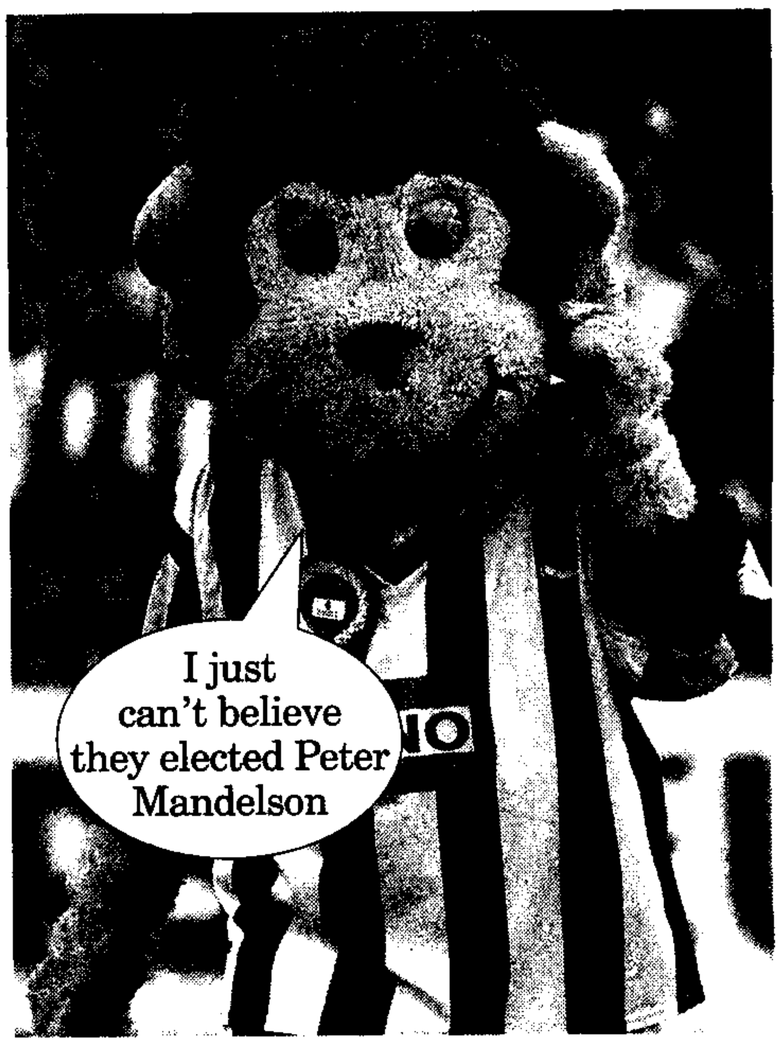
A SMART "stiffy" style invitation arrives at the *Eye*, but is not, alas, for us. The swanky invite to spend the weekend of 17-19 May in the sophisticated surroundings of the 85-room Swallow Churchgate hotel in Harlow, Essex, with its elegant restaurant, leisure club, swimming pool and sauna, is intended for organisers of, er, the new Newham credit union, which is being "facilitated" by Newham council's social regeneration unit (*Eyes* passim).

Credit unions for the poor are a good idea, of course — such a good idea that Newham council has been talking about setting one up for more than 10 years now, without doing so — but why does one of the poorest boroughs in the country need to spend £5,000 entertaining a couple of dozen people at a hotel to get the idea off the ground?

"Because it is a working weekend and people find it hard to find the time during the week," says the council's spokesman. "The training package is very good value. This is definitely not a junket." So that's all right, then. After you in the sauna!

● **EVEN after the defeat of the housing sell-off plan, the prospect of random demolition of one's home is a very real one in Birmingham. Last month Colin Campbell, 30, was getting ready for work when a runaway city council dustcart crashed into the front room of his new detached, three-bedroom house in Sutton Coldfield. The driver had allegedly left the brake off while getting down to have an argument with a passer-by. Miraculously Campbell was unscathed, but his house was completely destroyed. When he returned from a hospital check-up to search for his possessions he found that the house had been bulldozed and all his things tipped, except for a life-size plastic statue of Elvis Presley. Mr Campbell is still waiting for an apology.**

HARTLEPOOL SHOCK



NOOKS and CORNERS

WHEN it comes to architecture there is a natural tendency to disagree with whatever the Prince of Wales happens to be pontificating about.

His latest *casus belli* is the demolition of the Bishopsgate Goodsyard, which he has opposed via an article in the *Evening Standard*. Given the usual clichés and "jokes", this time about "the 'genetically modified' urban planning that has built so many soulless housing estates…", one can only groan.

The 10-acre site in question is in Shoreditch; and largely occupied by a partially bombed and long-redundant railway viaduct – the foundations of the long demolished and even longer-disused Bishopsgate railway terminus. English Heritage recently listed the "Braithwaite Viaduct" — to the fury of Railtrack and others with fingers in the pie.

But to describe a collection of brick industrial arches of the 1830s as "one of the city's most astonishing hidden treasures", as Charles does, is surely over the top even for him. Or is it? When one sees who is on the other side of the argument, the uncomfortable suspicion arises that the Prince of Wales, or his advisers, may actually be talking sense.

There is of course the mayor of London Ken Livingstone, who wants the site cleared for more office towers designed by his new ennobled architect friends to assist his other new friends in the nearby City of London. Then there are the architects, raring to go with an exciting new development. One of them, Will Alsop, described the viaduct as "a great ink blot on the map. If you removed that ink blot, what would that do?"

Why, give him the opportunity to put up another of the brightly coloured tubes on stilts, or, to make a change, one of his cubes on stilts for which he is famous. Alsop, it should be explained, is positioning himself to become the new "Big Jim" Stirling and a big star in the next generation – God forbid – of superstar architects. He thinks his Peckham Library "looks better than the Parthenon" and it goes without saying that he is a great genius.

Constructed in 1839-42, the Bishopsgate viaduct is one of the earliest railway structures in the world. Designed by the engineer John Braithwaite, it took the Eastern Counties Railway into its London terminus on superbly constructed elliptical arches. These vaulted spaces are partly occupied by small businesses and the planner and landscape architect Kim Wilkie has demonstrated that they could accommodate "a mixed development that responds to the local character." As for the argument that retaining the viaduct impedes progress by getting in the way of the proposed northward extension of the East London Line, the engineers commissioned by English Heritage, Alan Baxter & Associates, have shown this is nonsense.

The real problem is that the Bishopsgate Goodsyard structure will only take the weight of a four-storey development while Railtrack would like towers of up to 30 storeys on the site. But why should Shoreditch, like poor Spitalfields, suffer annexation by the City of London? And why should it be treated as a *tabula rasa* so that the likes of Will Alsop can show off and create utopia? Cities are most interesting and vibrant when they are a product of compromise between new and old, of smaller units rather than large, of incremental redevelopment. Even *Building Design* understands this, noting in an editorial that this "is not a fogey versus progressive debate — it is about money. It is about the values that we want our capital to embody." Quite.

WHEN I wrote about Penshurst Rectory (Eye 1050) I did not know about Save Our Parsonages (Bulmer Tye House, nr Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 7ED), a body dedicated to trying to stop the silly Church of England authorities flogging those that remain in use. "Parsonages are major resources which have for too long been treated as liabilities." So all strength to Save Our Parsonages (as well as to SAVE Britain's Heritage).

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Baker Street Station*

Submitted by Ron Rubin. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE distinguished baritone Sir Thomas Allen should have realised what would happen when he made his much-publicised speech against the dumbing-down of classical music at the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards last week.

He was attacked as an elitist (naturally), mocked on television ("opera singer gets cross about cross-over"), and made to look reactionary, old-fashioned, and a fool. Which very possibly he didn't mind. But many others in the music business mind the way the whole thing was so badly handled by the RPS, and deplore the brazen way it set up Sir Thomas as cannon-fodder for the press simply to publicise its annual awards – which no one otherwise takes any notice of.

The things he had to say were all worth saying: Russell Watson, Bond, Vanessa Mae, the "Opera Babes" and so many other music-hall turns currently peddled to the public as Great Artists are in truth absurdly modest talents whose deification is an insult to the genuine greats. But Allen made his points so ineffectually the argument was lost. And the responsibility lies with the RPS, which was too busy milking his speech for its own purposes to bother monitoring the content for small things like factual accuracy.

One of Allen's broader swipes was at the Festival Hall where concert programming, he says, has sunk to a simplistic level: nothing but Beethoven's 5th and Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique*. But as this week's *Classical Music Magazine* admits with embarrassment, there hasn't been a Beethoven 5 in months or a *Pathetique* in more than a year. In fact, the concerts have been full with Kurtag, Kaija Saariaho, Maxwell Davies and a lot of programmes of unusual sophistication. All in all, this speech has been an own-goal. And it made the RPS seem more than ever like the faltering, fogeyish, irrelevance that many in the classical music world consider it to be.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

AD NAUSEAM

THE new-look national lottery has announced its first jackpot winner – an advertising agency called WCRS, which has been gifted the best part of £50m to tell the nation that the "lottery" is now called "lotto".

Other beneficiaries of the windfall include "celebs" like Billy Connolly, the new face of a series of 10 TV ads that, along with one of the largest poster campaigns ever seen and a mailshot to nearly half the country, make for a combined push of £72m (all financed by the miserable addicts whose average weekly spend is £3.42 on the main game and £1.42 on scratch cards).

This latest relaunch comes only a month after a feelgood TV campaign which tried to convince punters that "You played. The nation won". It boasted of £11bn going into the conveniently non-descript "good causes" in eight years. Impressive stuff; though backed with a cumulative marketing spend of nearly £300m and with 29 million guaranteed "donors" hooked, several well-run charities would claim they could have done a lot better.

The fact remains that marketing overload and statistically miserable returns are turning people away from the lottery in droves. If Camelot really wanted to attract attention, it could try not advertising for a change, and instead up the chances of Joe Public getting a bean or two for his £3.42. Although Camelot's yearly adspend is already £30m, and the last few years have seen changes of ad agency, changes of tagline, a new "wobbly" typeface and even subtle alterations to the appearance of the podgy-fingers logo, it's all been to no avail. Ever since they gave up on "It could be you" (once it became apparent that it couldn't) ticket sales have plummeted, falling by 10 percent in the last four years.

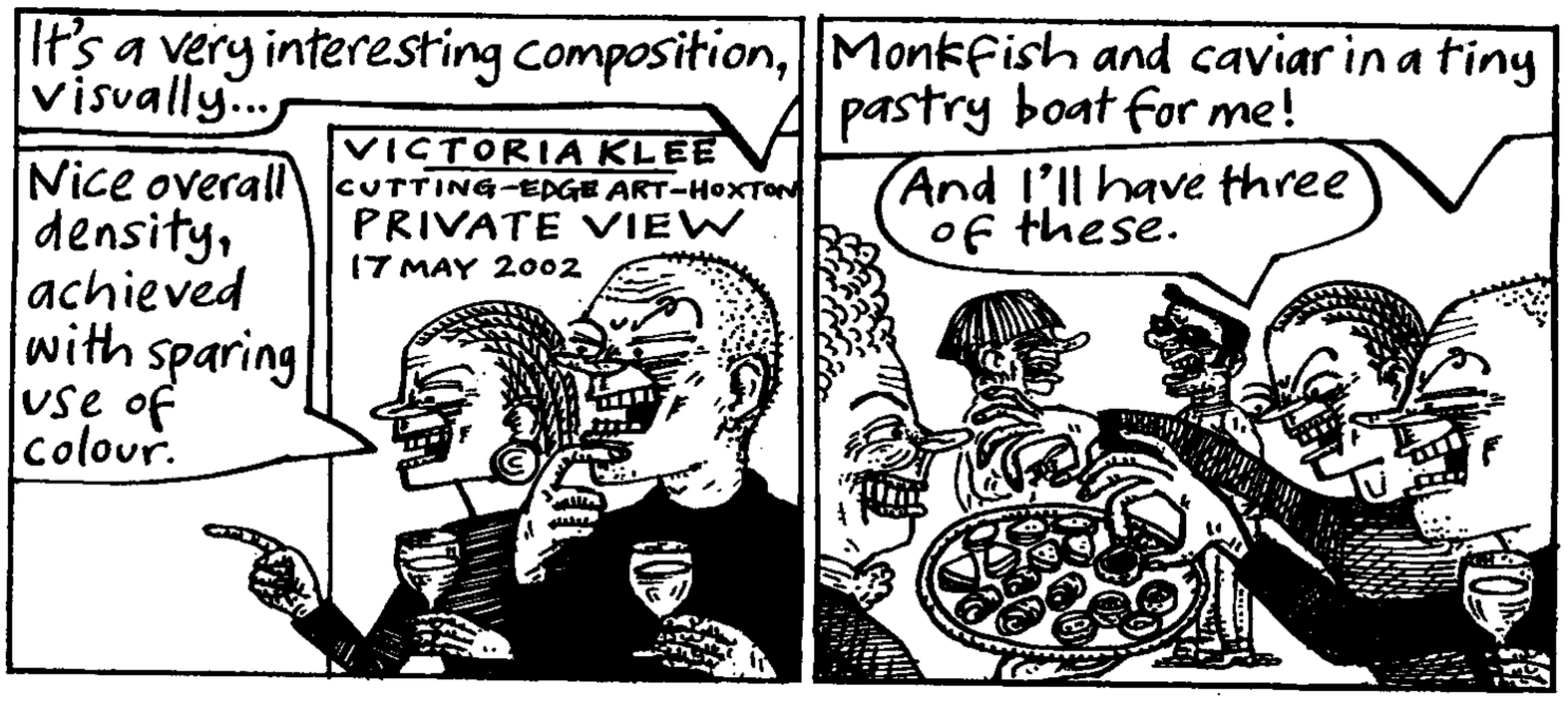
So why the revamp now? It might have something to do with the government's recently announced proposals to relax the gambling laws. Camelot bigwigs are aghast at the prospect that punters might soon be able to go into the bookies and bet on the Lotto numbers, but without making millionaires of besuited others in the process. They are shouting loud now before the lure of deregulated Bingo becomes too strong.

Hamiltons to be shot into space

Midweek Visitor (Southport)

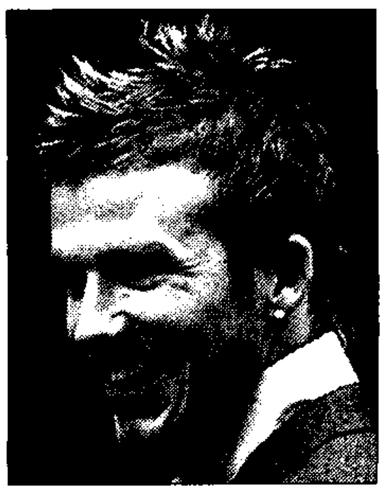
YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


It's a very interesting composition, visually...
Nice overall density, achieved with sparing use of colour.
VICTORIA KLEE
CUTTING-EDGE ART-HOXTON
PRIVATE VIEW
17 MAY 2002
Monkfish and caviar in a tiny pastry boat for me!
And I'll have three of these.

Letters

Lookalike



Sir,

I could not help but notice, when Mr David Beckham unveiled his new hair-do, what a striking resemblance he bears to Mr Stanley Laurel. Are they related?

TREVOR MARSHALL,

Via email.

Sturdy riposte

Sir,

*Although I was enormously gratified by Private Eye's "**Not** The Foot and Mouth Report" for its slating of the government shambles over FMD, I am somewhat put out by the latest "Even Newer Muckspreader". This criticism might seem rather self-serving seeing as I am the founder and member of the European parliament's investigative committee, but I would like to set a few facts straight for the record.*

For a start, whoever said the EP's inquiry should be a substitute for a British one? Our continental counterparts would have to have a more compelling reason to participate than to help the UK out of a scrape – this is about preventing anything similar from happening ever again in the European Union.

Personally, I thought the attacks on the committee chairwoman were rather cheap; Senora Redondo is an experienced and valued member of the parliament's agriculture committee and ideally placed to lead the FMD inquiry. Besides, I am sure that Spanish was far more comprehensible to the vets and farmers we met than the ministryspeak they had to stomach during the crisis. It is hoped there will be interpretation booths for subsequent trips.

The criticism that few MEPs seemed to have done much homework is laughable. The main aim of the trips to affected countries was to listen to the accounts of those hit by foot and mouth from tourism to farming, not to swamp the public with information from politicians. Brussels and Strasbourg is where the detailed analysis takes place.

As for the investigation's supposed "lack of structure", we now have follow-up questions in all hearings which facilitates greater scrutiny of witnesses. This means that men like Whitty, adept at skirting delicate issues, can now be pinned down.

If anything, the first trip to the UK helped to consolidate our purpose. The allegations that we receive nothing but official documents is spurious. The committee has access to all information submitted by witnesses and this is circulated regularly. One last correction is that we will be having 14 hearings, not the nine quoted and this number does not include all the meetings which take place on the planned trips.

It is fantastic that Private Eye is following the foot and mouth issue and I hope it will see fit to commenting on our final report out in November...

Yours sincerely,

ROBERT STURDY MEP.

What a Fokker

Sir,

ACHTUNG, for you Tommy, ze subbing is over. Much though I enjoy the sheer political incorrectness of "take that Fritz you cabbage-munching kraut" variety, your pedantic pig-dog correspondent who corrected your spelling of Spitfeuer as used by Victor comic committed worse sacrilege by misspelling DC Thomson, hallowed home not only of war comics but the wonderful Beano and Dandy. Anyway, war comic German should be in capitals because they shouted all the time.

BENEDICT LE VAY,

Via email.

Sir,

On the subject of WWII Kraut-speak (Eye 1053), I feel obliged to point out that the expression "Gott in Himmel" should in fact read "Gott IM Himmel". "Englander" should be spelt "Engländer" and the word "Spitfeuer" does not and has never existed as a word in the German language. "Spitfire" – used in the context of aeroplanes – is specific to that context and as such should not be translated, either in whole or in part.

Yours arrogantly,

MIKE EMERY,

Nailsea, Bristol.

Most boring letter ever

Sir,

In a piece entitled "An Apology, Mr Jon Snow And The Channel Four News Team" (p 19, Eye 1052), you refer to the King's Lynn Waitrose. Sadly, King's Lynn possesses no such facility. There is, however, a small food court in Marks & Spencer.

Yours,

JOE LONG,

Via e-mail.

Scenes You Seldom See (10)

"I know – let's have coffee at home"

North and south

Sir,

I was interested in your update on the Blair v Brown power battle (Eye 1051, page 3). But I was surprised at the implication that Norwich North MP Ian Gibson is doing the legwork for his Norwich South colleague Charles Clarke.

Gibson is a hard-working, popular MP who has lived in his constituency for years. Clarke is an unpopular, "New" Labour stooge who was parachuted into the city by Millbank in 1997.

Anyone who knows either MP knows they despise each other! Clarke deserves to fall flat on his face, while Gibson deserves the growing support he is receiving locally. (And I'm NOT a Labour voter, by the way.)

Best wishes,

ALFIE EDWARDS,

Norwich.

Own goal

Sir,

Surely someone in the corridors of your esteemed organ has a rudimentary knowledge of football to compensate for your editor's studied ignorance of "the beautiful game".

Page 18 of Eye 1052 made reference to the death of ITV Digital and quoted "one teary-eyed premier league striker" bemoaning the loss of his 40 grand weekly pay packet. Any fule kno that it is the Nationwide league clubs and their players who've been stitched up by Carlton and Granada. Those plying their trade in the premiership have the Dirty Digger to thank for the "grossly" part of their grossly inflated wages.

Yours pedantically,

MARK FIELDHOUSE,

Hove, Essex.

SUPERMODELS
KERBER
AGENCY
CHARLOTTE CHURCH– "REAR OF THE YEAR"
APPARENTLY THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF UPSET AT A 16 YEAR OLD GETTING SUCH AN AWARD!
HMMM..... YEAH WELL I S'POSE IT IS A BIT WRONG!...
YEAH!
...THEY SHOULD GIVE US YOUNGSTERS A CHANCE!!!
THAT'S RIGHT!
AGENCY

What's he don about?

Sir,

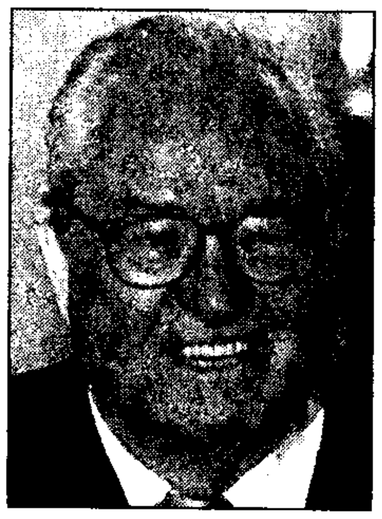
Re: Private Eye 1053. I have had my underpants down in public before but I was baffled by your correspondent's eccentric report of a seemingly self-induced debagging over a joke I told at the Istanbul Film Festival before a screening of my film My Kingdom (starring Richard Harris and written by Nick Davies). What was he on about?

Apart from implying that non-Turkish Muslims were somehow less likely to be outraged by the WTC atrocity, he also inaccurately implied that my delightful interpreter was publicly rude about me. No film festival host, especially in the hospitable and well-mannered Turkey I encountered, would mock an invited film director – even if he did unwittingly have his "pants" down about the religious demographics of his appreciative audience. By the way, "don" is Turkish for both "freeze" and "underpants". When next in Istanbul, I must try not to "don" my balls off in my "don"!

Best wishes,
DON BOYD,

Oxford.

Lookalike



Winterton

Le Pen

Sir,

Given the strong resemblance between Jean-Marie Le Pen and the husband of disgraced Ann Winterton, might one not speculate on right-wing physiognomy?

GREGORY LOYSE,

Edinburgh.

Slater Crawler

Sir,

I have no problem with your description of Jim Slater as "the grand daddy of the City Slickers" in Eye 1053. When Anil Bhoyrul and I were writing this column in The Mirror our well-thumbed copy of Jim's The Zulu Principle was a kind of Bible for us. In tipping shares we found his "Company REFS" indispensable too. I doff my cap to him.

But where I do take issue is with your assertion that Jim Slater isn't a fit and proper person to be the chairman of a listed company. As far as Mr Bhoyrul and I are concerned Jim should be given a knighthood for his services to the City. Without him Britain's industrial landscape would look very different today. Using traditional City manoeuvres like the takeover Jim woke up a great many corporate behemoths from their slumber and gave a much needed boot up the arse to the flabby, nepotistic managements of the 60s and 70s. He sharpened them up and made them competitive, inspiring the Thatcherite reforms of the 1980s culminating in what is usually called the Big Bang of 1986.

It is great news that Jim is back in the market.

Yours,
JAMES HIPWELL,

(City Slickers column, The Mirror 1998-2000).

Right on Brighton

Sir,

So Brighton & Hove's bid to become "European City of Culture" should be denied following the astonishing revelations that some of its revellers piss in public (Eye 1053). My ghast has seldom been so flabbered. Did I miss the latest EU directive prohibiting wanton micturation. However did those poor Glaswegians cope all those years ago?

Your organ's distaste for yoof culture is all too apparent. Brighton & Hove deserves recognition in view of the way in which it has successfully reinvented itself as a cultural extension of the capital. It also fares rather well in the tolerance/inclusivity blah blah stakes. Perhaps I have this all wrong and the city should best be left to rot in a manner becoming several jaded seaside morgues.

Yours burstingly,
JIM HIGHAM,

New Delhi.

See London and die

Sir,

The "mass involuntary euthanasia" (Doing the Rounds, Eye 1053) may, unfortunately, come from being poor but that has very little to do with being in the north of England! London is known for being both bad for your health and spanning the extremes of wealth. Statistics from the cabinet office social exclusion unit of the most deprived neighbourhoods in 1998 place even the City of Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea 41st and 42nd, above Burnley and Preston at 43rd and 44th respectively. Thirteen of the 20 most deprived neighbourhoods are in London. I heard from a GP in my home town that Londoners' life expectancy is five years lower than average – indeed ever since I came to London from North Yorkshire (a pleasant and affluent area, if you like this brand of snobbery) my health has been worse – due to the filthy state of the air, the Tube and the local journalism!

Regards,
C. TURNBULL,

Via email.

Leigh sure

Sir,

Everything you've ever written about me in the past has always been stunningly accurate. But into every life a little rain must fall, I suppose. I didn't "arrive in court with the Libyan entourage" to see the Sunday Telegraph retract its false story about the Gaddaffis which MI6 planted on them. I went there on my own account out of professional curiosity. I wasn't on "the Tripoli team" then or ever, whatever your disgruntled informant might hint. I don't approve of regimes which kill innocent people.

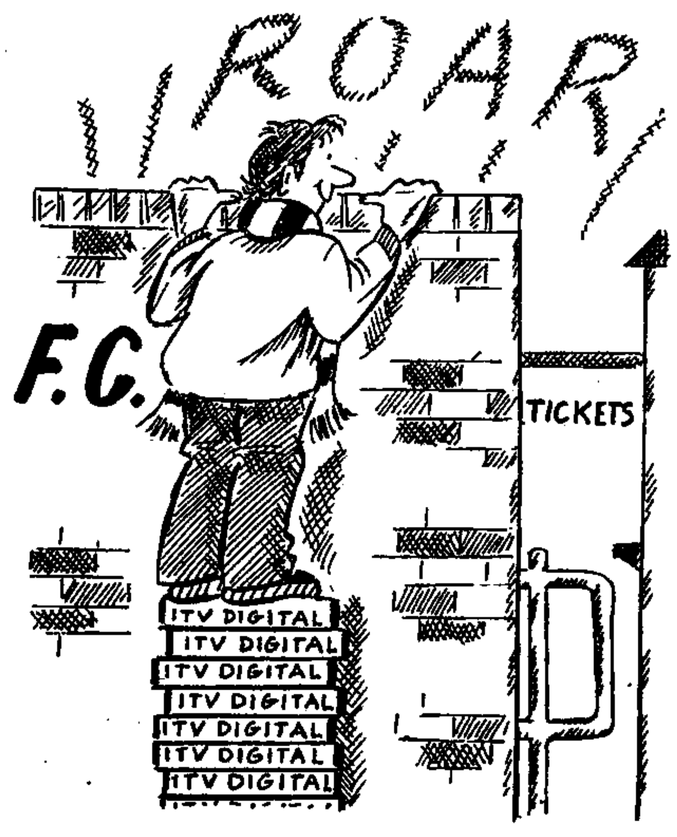
Best wishes,
DAVID LEIGH,

Investigations Editor, The Guardian.

A SHRUB in a pot, worth £25 was stolen from Shrub End Road, Shrub End in Colchester.

Evening Gazette (Colchester)

101 Uses For An ITV Digital Box
No.1 : Watching Football



Ulri-car, car, car...

Sir,

I can't have been the only person to have noticed the resemblance between the irrepressible, passionate, turbo-charged Swede on the front cover of Eye 1053, and the Saab 9-5 Aero Estate on the back cover. Did they come off the assembly line together? We should be told.

Regards,
PAUL THOMPSON,

Scone, Scotland.

BIRTH

To Annie & Tony Rushton, 10.5.02, a girl, Lola Ruby Atalanta.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"And the hush of anticipation is rising to a crescendo..."
RON PICKERING, Munich Olympics 1972
(A. Hardie)

"He couldn't have got any closer – although maybe he will this time."
JOHN VIRGO, BBC
(Terry Hurley)

"It's a tense time for managers. They have to exhume confidence"
GARY LINEKER, BBC1
(Matthew Flynn)

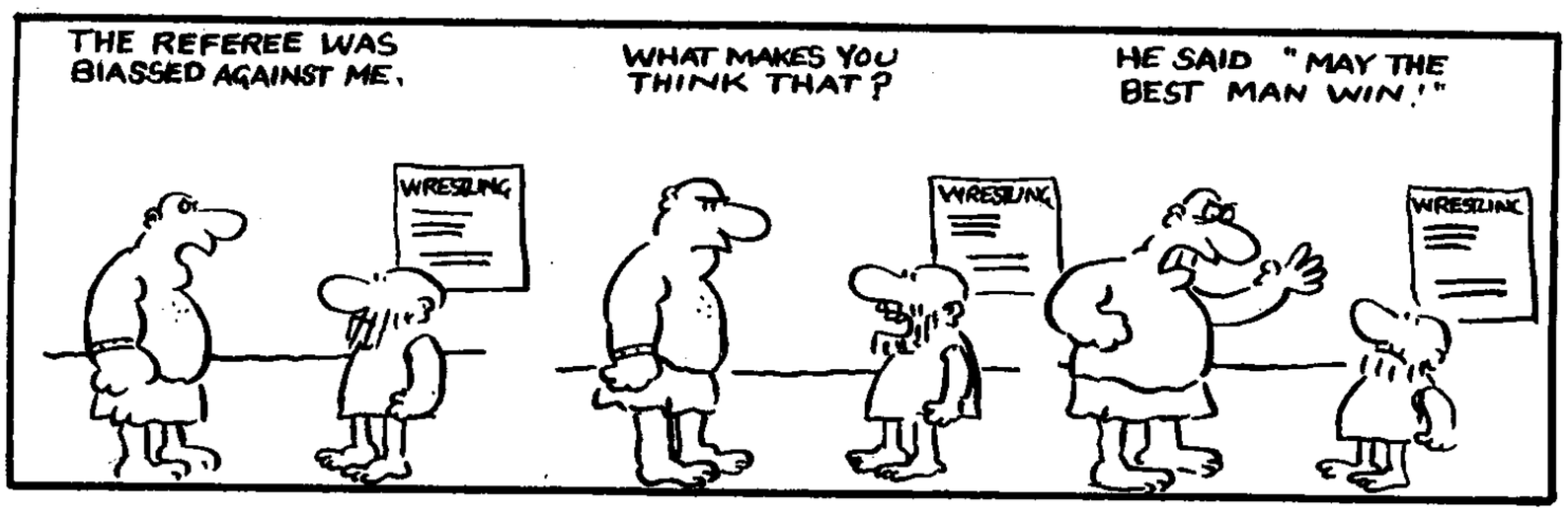
"Only he knows what he's thinking now. He'll be thinking that was his last chance to rescue the game."
JOHN VIRGO, BBC2
(Jim Candlin)

Liz Barker: *So what did you think when you first met Kylie?*

Pete Waterman: *Well, to be honest, I wasn't actually there.*
(Laura Gill)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Sarajevo**
from Our Own Correspondent

LIFE is beginning to look up in Bosnia. Ten years after we were plunged into a catastrophic war, we can toast a host of proud achievements.

Danis Tanovic has just returned home with the Oscar he won for best foreign film in Hollywood. There is talk of Sarajevo hosting the winter olympics, a world class event for a world class city of the likes of, er, Lillehammer or Calgary. But best of all we are looking forward to the arrival here as the new High Representative of none other than that celebrated international statesman and scion of British democracy, Lord Pedi Esdaun.

The unkind among us look at the ex Liberal Democrat leader formerly known as Paddy Ashdown as another nondescript, has-been politician sent by friends abroad to lord it over us. But at least he's a *real* lord. As a former soldier he's well qualified to run our ravaged homeland, although unlike many of our own aspiring politicians he lacks the whiff of personal involvement in a war crime or atrocity of any consequence.

Lord Esdaun comes to a country that is now a member of the Council of Europe. To show what good citizens we are, earlier this year we were only too happy to hand over a clutch of Algerian terrorist suspects to American defenders of democracy, a transaction faulted only by extremists and hairy human rights activists who pointed out that the men were Bosnian citizens, leaving their deportation to Guantanamo legally somewhat suspect.

Still, we are beginning to learn that ignoring awkward rules is all part of being in the civilised world. We are only now becoming accustomed to the lavish praise and money donors heap on the international Property Commission, the useless but extremely expensive agency sent to help us sort out the mess of who owns what in a land marked by so many thousands of refugees. Our officials do the leg-work and the commission issues fancy title certificates that no one wants, are probably wrong and for which the local government still has to do the dirty job of enforcement.

Then there is the UN. Like its counterparts at the Property Commission, its fixed-term contract staff worked out long ago that a job done well and quickly soon means no job at all. Training of our police has been left to Nigeria, a country not always associated with best practice in law enforcement, discipline or accountability. As our boys in blue learn the best Africa has to offer in corruption, we can but admire as the UN casts a benevolent eye over the 4,000 Bosnian police squatting in other people's homes... and shows even more indulgence towards the official who is busy with his own, private in-depth research into the trafficking of young women.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe is another source of inspiration. In an efficiency drive to promote its expanding operation in Bosnia, it has been replacing field staff with 40 £12,000 photocopiers. No doubt state of the art office equipment will better serve the needs of its bureaucracy than did those bothersome human rights and democratisation officers.

But we in Bosnia remain proud of our place as the crucible for the international community's experiment with nation-building. For sometimes our friends are here to learn as well as to teach. Take, for example, Brcko district on our restive north-eastern frontier. There, two former officers and gentlemen of your own proud army soon to be under Lord Esdaun's command, regularly ignore the elected assembly, remove judges on a whim, resettle populations and flout the property return law that they themselves insisted be adopted. They declare education to be their priority and, to emphasise this, they take over the largest school for their offices. Strangely, there is now a lack of school facilities. And yet the world praises the harmonious cooperation which is Brcko!

As our friends in former Yugoslavia used to say of us, *Jebem ti zemlju koja Bosna nema* – "I fuck any country that doesn't have a Bosnia."

FUNNY OLD WORLD

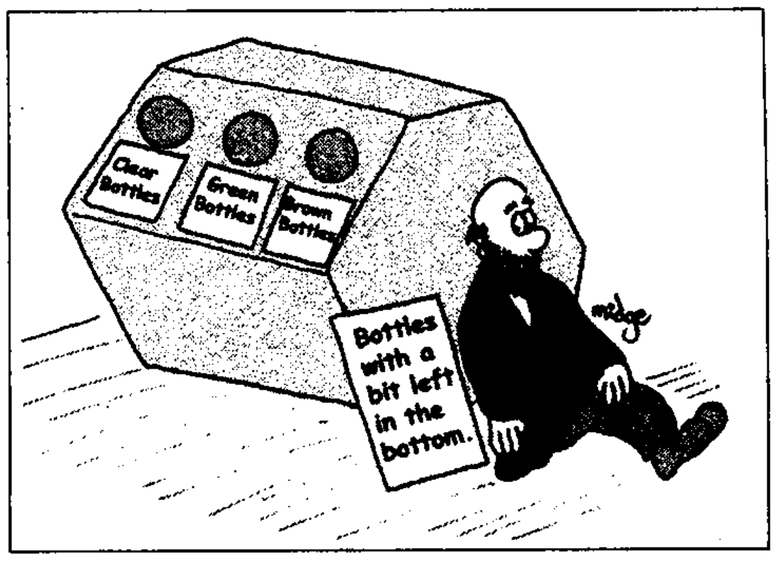
COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

INSPIRATIONAL SPORTS STATUES Handpainted resin statues on a solid wood base are the perfect gift for every young Catholic athlete. These statues portray Jesus actively participating with boys and girls in a variety of sports. A wonderful way to reinforce Jesus 'as friend' in everyday activities. $19.95. *(CatholicShopper.com. Spotter: Paul Murphy)*

— o —

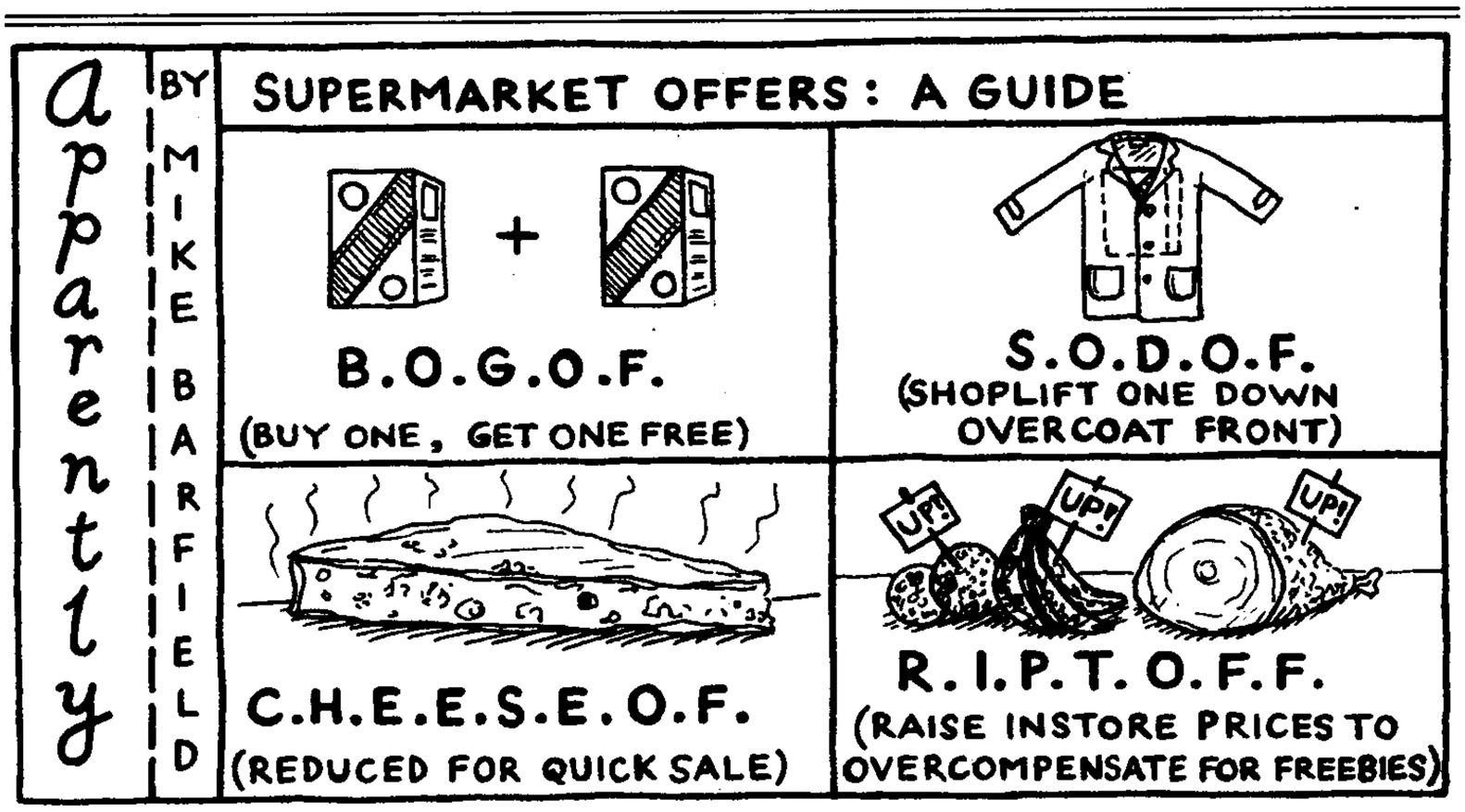
"When we received the anonymous tip-off, we were naturally suspicious," a spokesman for the city police told reporters in Munich, "because the caller said he'd seen his neighbour entering his apartment carrying what appeared to be a dead body, and that it wasn't the first time he'd seen him acting suspiciously. The police chief decided to storm the building, so three police cars were sent to the scene, armed officers battered the suspect's door down, and burst in, catching the suspect unawares.

"At first, the suspect seemed surprised and disturbed, and was reluctant to let the officers search his apartment. But when they explained that they were investigating a possible murder, he invited them into his bedroom and showed them his newly-acquired silicon sex doll. 'So much better than the inflatable ones,' he told them, 'because she doesn't collapse when you're using her, and she has a voice box that shouts "ooh ah... that hurts... you are too big honey..."' He then began showing the officers his entire collection of sex dolls, numbering more than a dozen, and confided that he had just been testing out his newest acquisition, moments before the officers had burst the door down. At that point, they decided that they didn't want to disturb him any longer, so they left the apartment and closed the file." *(News 24 [Zambia], 27/3/02. Spotter Gary Dring)*



— o —

"I don't think I'm being unreasonable," forty-eight-year-old Harvey Taylor told a press conference in Bangor, Maine, "and just because I'm a convicted sex offender, that doesn't mean I don't have rights. Let's get the facts straight. I was flashing in the shopping mall when I was approached by a detective. I panicked and ran into the Maine woods, with the police in hot pursuit. If they'd been competent, they would have caught me right away and I would have been in jail that very same day. But because of their incompetence, I ended up hiding in the woods for three months, and was so badly frostbitten by the time they finally arrested me that two or three toes on my left foot have now had to be amputated. If that detective had done his job properly, none of this would have happened. But because he was lazy or inept, I lost two or three toes and I demand compensation. No, I don't know exactly how many toes I've lost, because I don't want to look closely at my foot. It distresses me. But it's definitely either two or three." *(Bangor Daily News [Maine], 16/3/02. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent (Acting): Mrs Cherie Booth (MA Liverpool)

Hullo,

And in case any of you are wondering why the vicar's wife is chairing this week's newsletter, the explanation is simple.

Firstly, Tony is far too busy on other parish business to devote his valuable time to keeping parishioners informed as to what is going on.

Secondly, it is high time that the vicar's message was written by a woman.

And, thirdly, I consider that in many ways I am better qualified than Tony to discuss a wide range of parish policy issues (as Tony would be the first to agree!).

So let me tell you what I have achieved to date.

In recent weeks I have led a number of study groups at the vicarage, under the heading "Where Are We Going And What Are We Trying To Achieve?"

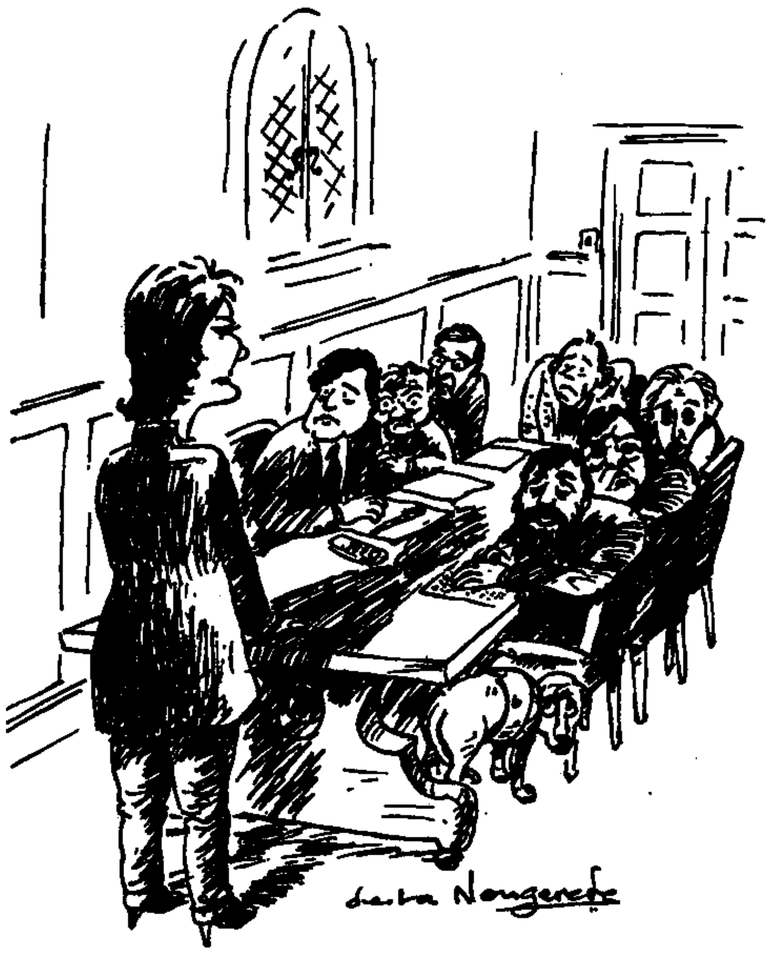
Only last week I invited Mr Birt to talk to members of the PCC in his capacity as "Blue Skies Thinking Co-ordinator" on "The Way Ahead For Improving Access For Cyclists To The Church Graveyard Facility".

Mr Birt gave a very interesting lecture, with the aid of flipcharts and Powerpoint graphics, on the need to set up a suitable structure of committees to analyse and assess the available options with regard to any future developments in this context.

Another extremely useful policy meeting took place on the subject of "What does it mean to be British?"

This is a very important issue in today's multi-faith, multi-cultural, multi-gender society, and it is vital that we in St Albion's set out a template for the sort of person who defines the spirit of Britishness in a St Albion's context.

As a suitable paradigm, we looked at the



Cherie takes charge (Thanks to Mr de la Nougerede!) T.B.

example of a successful, 40-something career woman, with a young family and a husband who is a vicar working part-time.

We all agreed that such a person would be an ideal aspirational icon for the young people of St Albion's.

At question time, one of our local Asian businessmen, Mr Gotricha Hinduja, said that he would like to be British and could he have a passport?

He was seconded in this by our former Churchwarden Mr Mandelson, who spoke very movingly on behalf of his "good friend" Mr Hinduja, whom he assured us he had never met.

Mr Blunkett of the Neighbourhood Watch then said that there were a lot of people who wanted to become British, but that this was a very crowded island and was now full.

Tea and biscuits were provided by Mrs Jowell, and a vote of thanks to myself was supported by everyone present.

I seem to be going on a bit, but I think by now you will all have got a good idea as to just what a valuable contribution I am making to the running of the church, even though I am not technically a member of the PCC.

And, incidentally, I am increasingly impatient with all those other parishioners who say that it is inappropriate for someone who has not been elected to be given a leading role in parish policy-making.

Could I remind you all that, wearing my other hat, I am now a judge, and would be perfectly entitled to recommend a custodial sentence for anyone spreading such calumnies about someone whose only motivation is to serve the parish in any way she can.

Yours threateningly,
Ms Cherie Booth QC

THE VICAR WRITES: *Thanks, Cherie, for a brilliant letter which has put all the problems of the parish in perspective! I must admit that when you first suggested taking over the newsletter, I did wonder whether there might be some objections from less forward-thinking parishioners! But Mr Campbell tells me that he has received very few letters on this subject (in the low hundreds) and has decided not to print any of them! T.B.*

Advertisement

Hello, Churchgoers!

It's Dirty Des – your friendly Adult Entertainment Purveyor.

You are all welcome to come and peruse my wares if you fancy something a little stronger than the parish newsletter! No offence, Your Reverence!

I know that many of you support the Third World, which is why many of my lovely babes in provocative poses hail from those distant parts! Perhaps these are some immigrants Mr Blunkett should allow to stay!

Anyway, I am right behind the Vicar in his courageous action to take my cheque and put this advert in free of charge.

Dirty Des, 132 Tesco Road,
2nd Floor (ring bell),
Cash transactions only

**Special discount to anyone bringing a hymn book!*

"Blessed are the goal-makers"
(Book of Clichés, 4,24.)

The vicar meets the St Albion Footie Team and asks manager Sven if *he* could be picked! "We don't need another right-winger" jokes Sven! A.C.

To Remember (Yet Again) In Your Prayers

● Sadly, our prayers for Mrs Mowlam have still not been answered! Mrs Mowlam is still with us and still, regrettably, harping on a number of imaginary grievances concerning the Vicar and her time on the PCC. Let us all pray that a meteorite from outer space may soon bring Mo's mental anguish to a swift and merciful end, and help to put the rest of us out of our misery! T.B.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MR BYERS

The vicar will not be commenting on Mr Byers at this stage due to problems with lies on the leavings (Shurely "leaves on the line" A.C.)

— Valete —

We are all desperately sad about the tragic passing away of Mrs Castle, who for many decades has been one of the most respected members of our parish. No one could dispute that in her earlier years, "Barbara", as we all knew her, made many valuable contributions to the PCC, particularly her insistence that women should play a much greater role in church affairs (no doubt she would have been very pleased to read Cherie's letter above!).

Unfortunately, in her later years, Mrs Castle became somewhat deranged, becoming tragically bitter and insane (rather like Mrs Mowlam!). She even made one particularly embarrassing exhibition of herself when she accused the Vicar of being "vain, shallow, self-obsessed and without principle". Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth, as I hope our special gravestone for Mrs Castle will demonstrate (thanks to local artist Mr Bernie for this picture!) T.B.

Mr Campbell's Thought For The Week

"If we say we have no spin, we deceive ourselves (although, in the circumstances, a certain amount of spin is quite understandable really)"

Book of Common Blair (as revised by A. Campbell)

BYERS 'HAD SCREW LOOSE'

by Our Rail Staff **Lynda Lee Potters Bar**

"HOW could it have happened so soon after the previous disasters?" That is what the country is asking as investigators sift through the evidence of yet another disaster involving Stephen Byers.

Says one expert, "It's a clear case of points failure. Mr Byers has failed to grasp *any* of the points about Rail Safety made over the last ten years.

"Byers was an accident waiting to happen," he continued, "and now the inevitable has taken place, Byers has not resigned."

Said a typical commuter, "We have to take Byers every day because there is no alternative. But we have no confidence in him and it is a daily white knuckle ride with him operating the system."

LATE NEWS

● The departure of Mr Byers has been delayed again.

BLAIR CALLS FOR NEW FUNDING SYSTEM

by Our Political Staff **Simon "Hugh" Heffer**

THE SHOCK revelation that the Labour Party accepted a £100,000 donation from a leading figure in the adult entertainment industry (porn), Mr Dirty Desmond, has prompted the government to call for a new method of funding political parties.

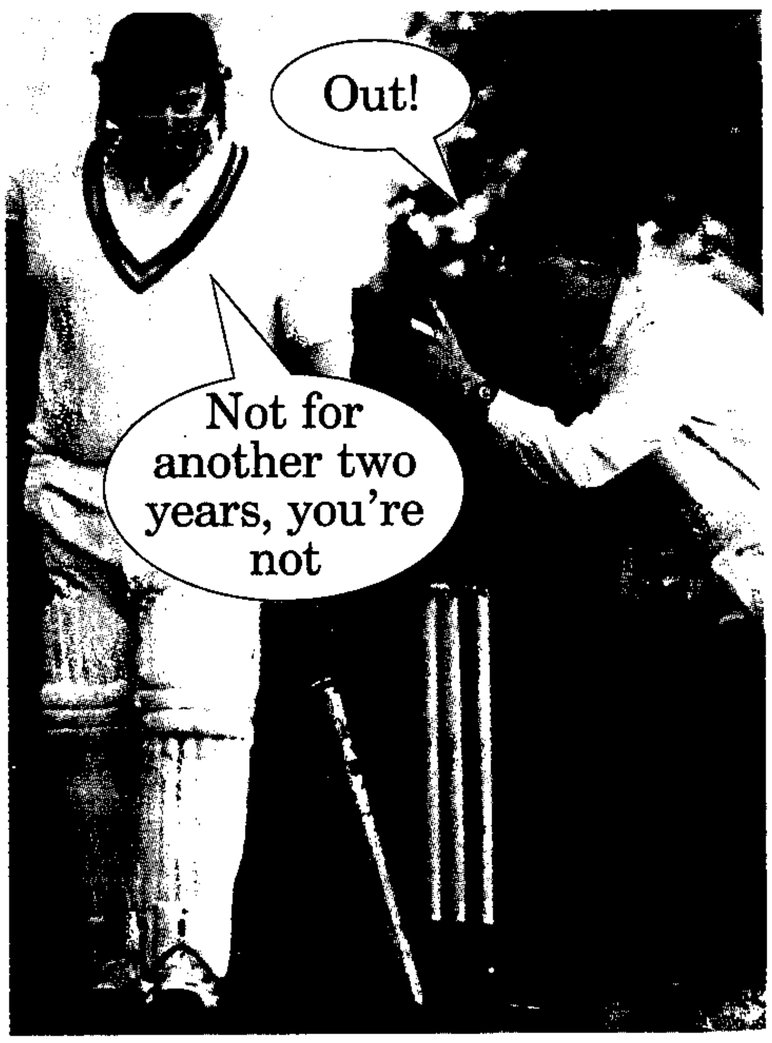
Said Mr Blair, "This proves once and for all that politicians like myself cannot be trusted to finance their campaigns with any degree of integrity.

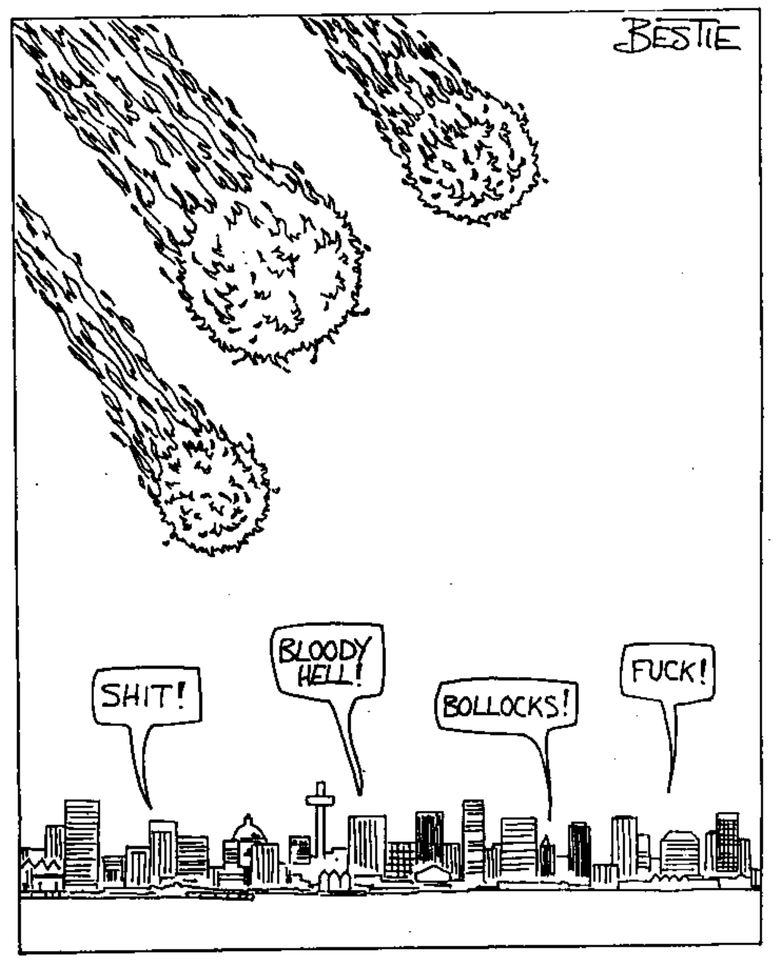
"The temptation is just too much," he continued, "and even when money is offered to me by an obvious sleaze merchant like my friend Des, I cannot resist it."

He concluded, "I feel sure that the taxpayer will want to foot the bill for all political parties on the basis that only then can I be relied upon to act honestly."

Mr Tony Blair is £100,000.

OWZAT!





WHEN THE GREAT BALLS OF FIRE APPROACHED
NOBODY SAID 'GOODNESS GRACIOUS'

(In memoriam Otis Blackwell, songwriter)

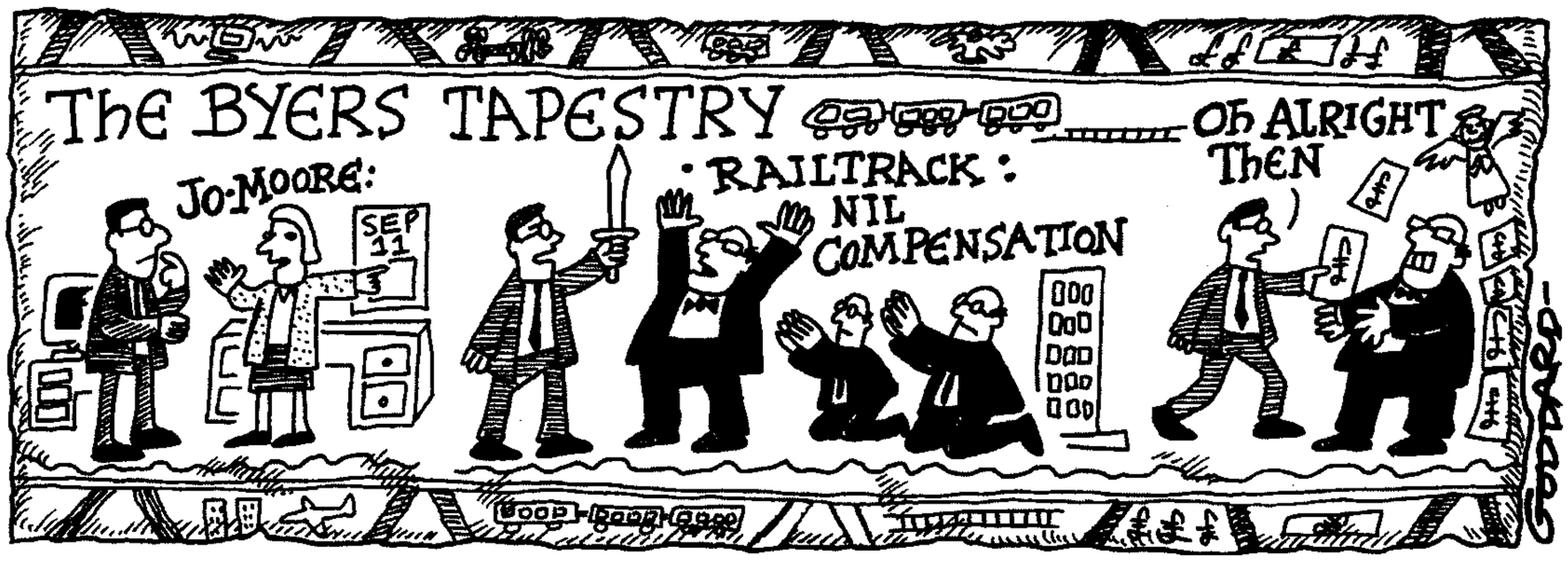
POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Ian Gillies, question-setter for Mastermind

So. Farewell then
Ian Gillies,
Quiz-setter extraordinaire.

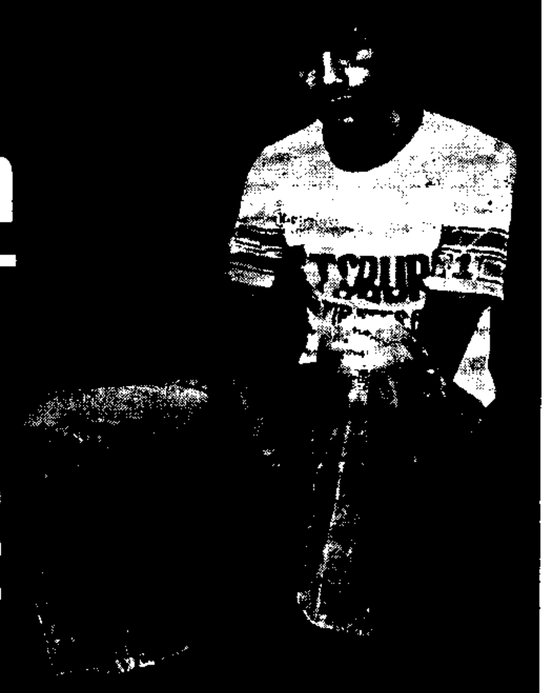
You started
And so
You have finished.
Which means you can
Now answer
The Big
Question.

E.J. Thribb (17½ out of a possible 20 – and no passes)



The David Mail, Friday, May 17, 2002

Should I Be Banned From Writing Pieces About Flares?



by **Daily Thomas**

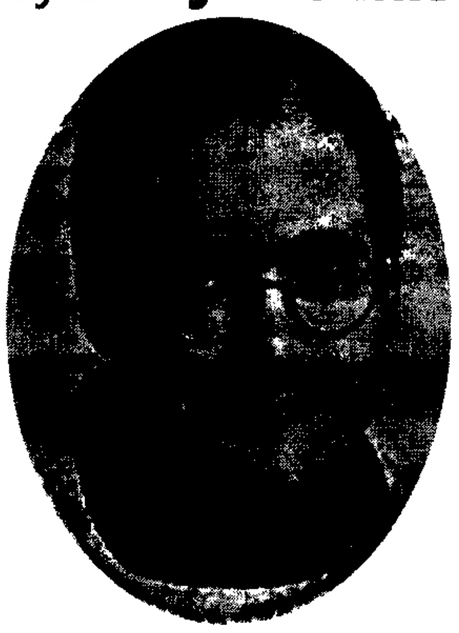
12 PUPILS have been banned from their school for wearing flares, which raises the important question: Can I spin 1000 words out of this non-story?

Flannel

Of course I can. The thing is that pieces about flares are back! They may be silly and pointless and they may make the writer look ridiculous – but, hey, that's fashion.

Pants

Every few years pieces about flares become all the rage. But why? Is it because they allow the writer to feel young again, to rehash his old pieces about flares and put in an old picture of himself looking young and hairy? *(See above.)*



Lack of Flare

Whatever the reason, you can be sure of one thing – there will be another piece by me about something equally feeble tomorrow.

© Mailtrash

AOL WOMAN MUGGED

by Our Crime Staff
Phil Cyberspace

A WOMAN yesterday became the latest victim of the crime wave when she was robbed of £15 by someone claiming that they would connect her to the internet.

Said the woman, "I handed over the money as I was asked, but then suddenly I was told that I was unable to get a carrier signal on my computer."

She continued, "Three hours later I was still bewildered and at a loss. It was daylight robbery."

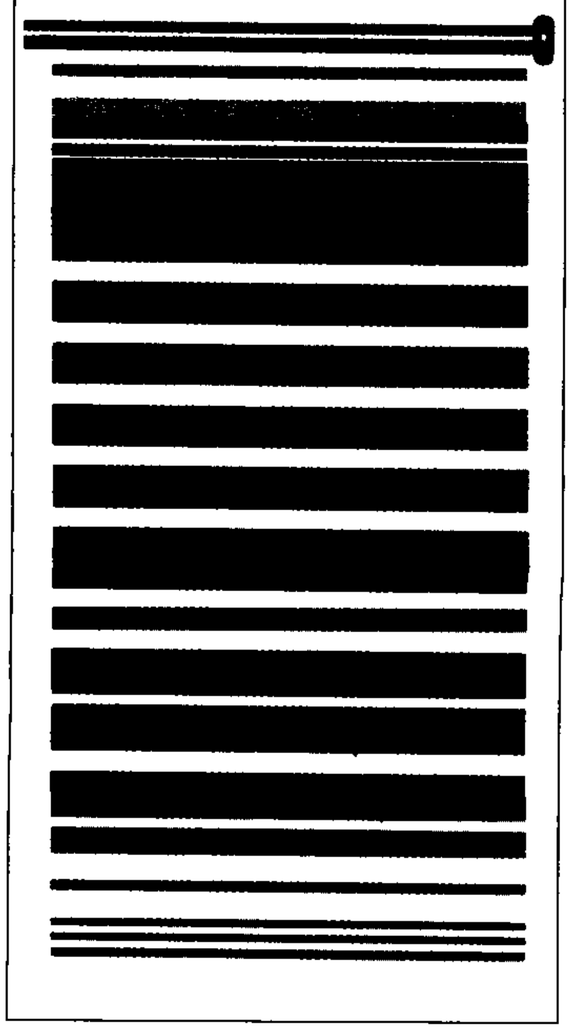
Bit Of A Connie

The perpetrator of the alleged robbery, described as very large and American, was identified only as Mr A.O.L. He was last seen counting the money and wondering whether to buy Channel 5.

TV Latest

● Channel 5 regrets that it cannot connect you to any programmes.

GERMANS REPLACE EU FLAG WITH BEACH TOWEL SHOCK



WORLD EXCLUSIVE

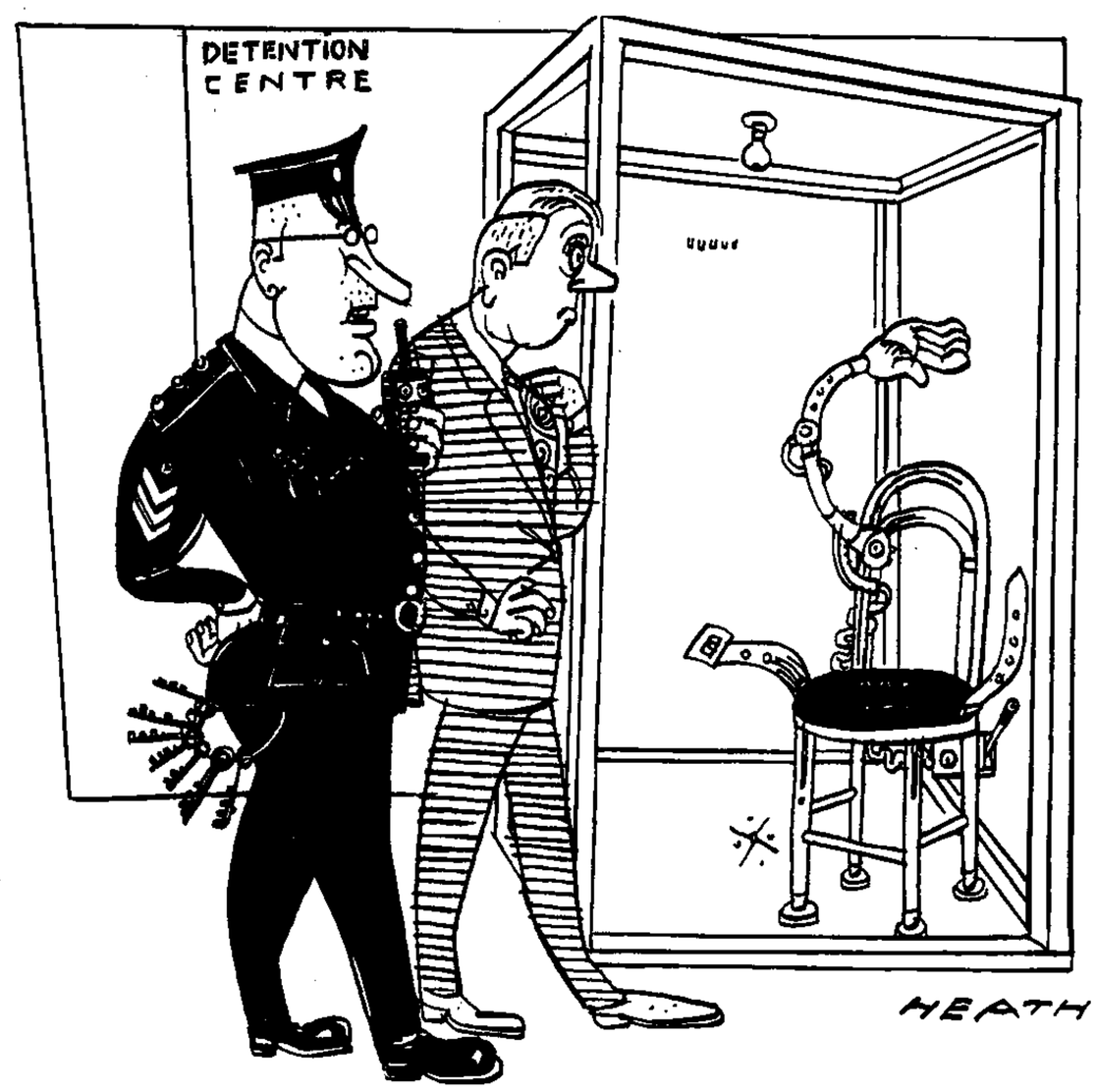
As a mark of respect to the late Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Private Eye is proud to publish the contents of Her Majesty's Will

List of Personal Effects

- 6000 assorted hats, mainly pale blue, with fruit and floral attachment
- 6000 prs gloves, many unused and still in their original boxes
- 6000 handbags, many containing original race cards, betting slips, miniatures of various spirits
- 1 silver hip flask, bearing Royal crest and inscription "With the compliments of the Gordon Gin Distillery Co, Nuneaton, Christmas 1923"
- 1 signed photograph of the late Sir Noel Coward, bearing the autograph legend "From one old Queen to another"
- 1 oil painting by the late Sir Alfred Munnings, entitled "They're Off", depicting the commencement of the Caesarewitch Stakes, Doncaster, in 1912
- 1 complete bound set of Horse and Hound for 1937
- 1 stuffed fox, with silver plate inscribed "Shot by HRH the Duke of Gloucester, 1917"
- 1 watercolour study by HRH the Prince of Wales, showing Scottish mountains under snow, entitled "Lochnaegood"
- 1 copy of The Ali G Christmas Video 2000, inscribed "To Great-Granny, have a wicked Christmas, 'respec', with love from Wills and Harry"

Plus

£50 million-worth of assorted castles, coaches, paintings, koh-i-noor diamonds, dogs, walking sticks, letters from Coutt's bank reminding Her Majesty that her account was £4 million overdrawn, etc.



"It's an electric bottom smacker for persistent young offenders"

NUMBER TEN ANNOUNCES MORE OPEN GOVERNMENT

by Our Political Staff **Mr Lobby**

IN THE most dramatic shake-up in the history of political journalism, the government has decided to scrap the lobby system of unattributed briefings and instead to develop a US style open forum.

"The public are sick of anonymous sources," said a top Downing Street official. "What they want is an honest and transparent system of on-the-record reporting. But don't quote me on that."

Campbell's Souper

Said another high-level government source, "Now is the perfect time to make the announcement that we are stopping all the spinning. Largely because it will detract attention from the Cherie Blair story, the council elections and the calls for Stephen Byers to resign."

Film Highlights

Starbucks

Attack Of The Clones

THOUSANDS of identical coffee shops try and take over the universe, serving uniform Tall Cappuccinos and Skinny Lattes With Wings. Will the evil Empire succeed in its plan for total galactic domination or will lone rebel cafe owner Obi Wan Lumpofsugar fight back against the dark force of globalisation? No.

Eye Rating: Certainly keeps you awake.

ROY of the SKID ROVERS
MELCHESTER UNITED ARE IN DESPERATE FINANCIAL STRAITS AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF ITV DIGITAL...
WHO'S THE BASTARD IN BLACK?
COME ON YOU IN THE REDS
I'M THE OFFICIAL RECEIVER
OH DEAR
P45
HE'S BRINGING ROY OFF!
GO!!!!!!
J COOPER
YOU WERE ALWAYS GOOD IN THE BOX ROY
I'VE BECOME INVISIBLE JUST LIKE ITV DIGITAL
FOOTBALL'S BECOMING HOMELESS

Nursery Times

'Spinocchio Is Not A Liar' Claims Puppet Maker

by Stephen Lyers

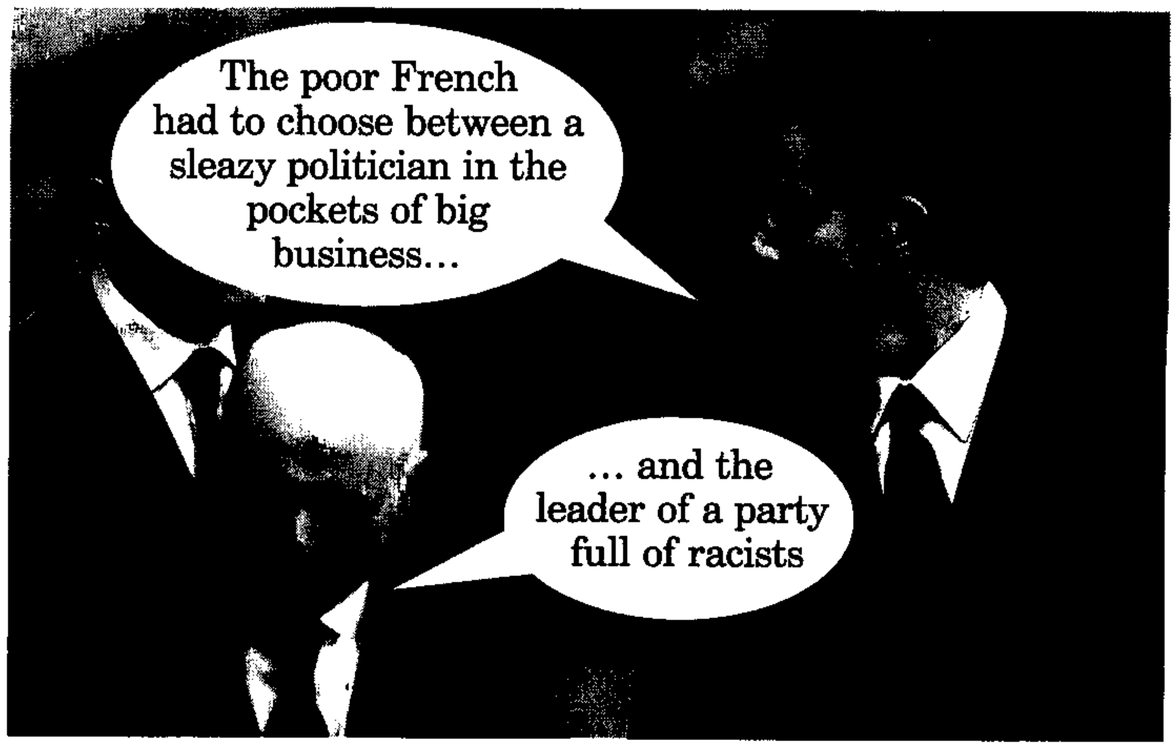
AFTER a dramatic week the puppet maker Toni Geppetto has given his favourite doll his full backing.

"Spinocchio is not a liar," he said, "and his nose is the average length for boys of his age (49).

"He has always answered questions to the best of his knowledge and if the information he has given has been inaccurate, it is not Spinnochio's fault but that of

his advisers, particularly Sir Jimmy Cricket who is known to be an idiot."

Toni Blairetto is 43.


The poor French had to choose between a sleazy politician in the pockets of big business...
... and the leader of a party full of racists

BIN LADEN'S WHEREABOUTS STORIES MAY BE DEAD

by Our War On Terror Correspondent **Dee Mobbed**

AS hundreds more articles about Osama Bin Laden retreat daily to the middle pages of the newspapers, speculation grows that stories about the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden may now be completely dead.

"We sometimes now go for weeks without even sighting one of these stories saying he may be hiding in a mountainous bunker in Northern Iraq, or was killed by US bombing back in February," said one scientist, "and studying the DNA fragments of how quickly people turn over to read the sports pages, we believe these stories are in fact dead."

THAT BBC IQ TEST IN FULL

1. Which is the odd one out in the following sequence?

Archimedes
Einstein
Leonardo da Vinci
Anne Robinson

2. Which of the following words are closest in meaning?

BBC
ITV
Dumbing Down
Grapefruit Segments

3. Fill in the missing item in this progression:

EastEnders (Monday)
.....
EastEnders (Wednesday)
EastEnders (Thursday)

4. Another chance to see question 3 *(Rpt)*

COURT CIRCULAR

BECKINGHAM PALACE

Their Royal Highnesses the Posh and Poshess of Becks graciously received a number of guests at a special reception to mark the commencement of the World Cup. The procession was as follows:

First Stretch Limousine
Sir David Frostie and Lady Ocarina of Weston Supertoseeyou

First Helicopter
Mr Mohamed Al-Fugger of Harrods with his bodyguard Ex-Chief Inspector Backhander of the Metropolitan Police Force

Second Stretch Limousine
Her Royal Highness the Joan of Collins with her husband Darby; ex-TV's the Cilla of Black and her Lady-in-Waiting Mrs Dale Winton; Sir Angus of That Deayton; Sir Richard Beardie of Virgin; Sir Elton of Candlewind and partner; TV's Mr Graham Norty

Third Stretch Limousine
Mr Jamie Allover, Mrs Jules Allover and their baby Ms Sainsbury Allover

First Team Coach
His Excellency Sven-Bonkin Ericsson and his fiancée Principessa D'Ollio Di Yum Yum; various other men in ill-fitting suits believed to be Prince Edward of Sherringham, Lord David of Seaman and Sir Nickswell Butt *(Who he? Ed.)*

Man In Dirty Mac
Richard "Dirty Desmond", Pornographer-in-Chief to His Highness Tony Blair

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD

HOW CAN YOU JUSTIFY RELEASING A GANGSTA RAP STYLE WORLD CUP SONG?..
ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S A GENRE THAT MANY WOMEN FIND DEGRADING!!
OH COME ON GABBY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT ALL THE FUSS IS ABOUT..
YO BITCH, THE OFF-SIDE RULE IT GO LIKE THIS...

Exclusive to the Guardian

Pim Fortuyn: That Hard Right Agenda In Full

- Homosexual marriages to be officially recognised.
- Equal rights for all women.
- Recreational drugs to be legalised.
- No to the Euro.

(That's enough sickening fascist policies. Ed.)

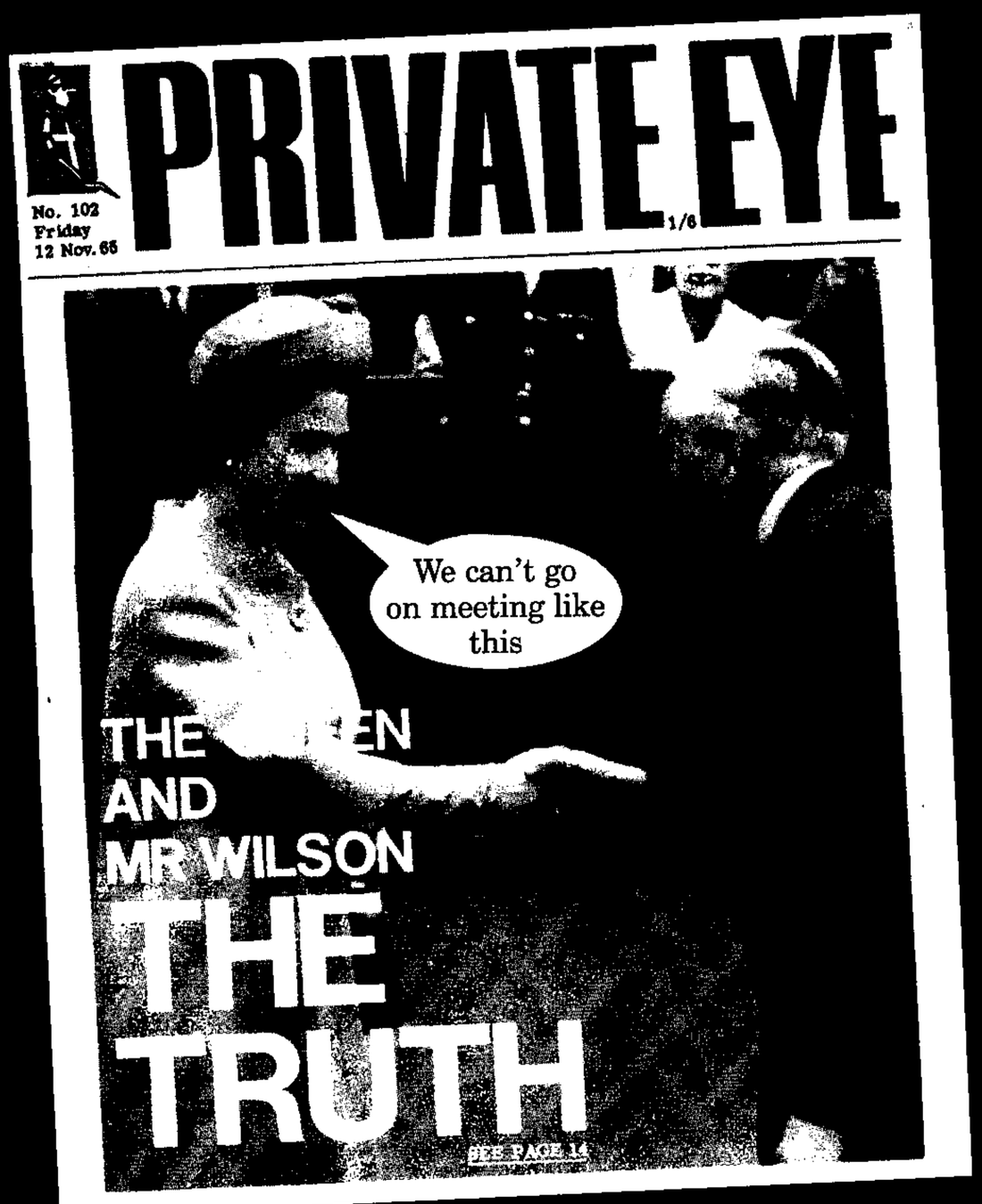
Her Majesty The Queen

A LOYAL JUBILEE ALBUM

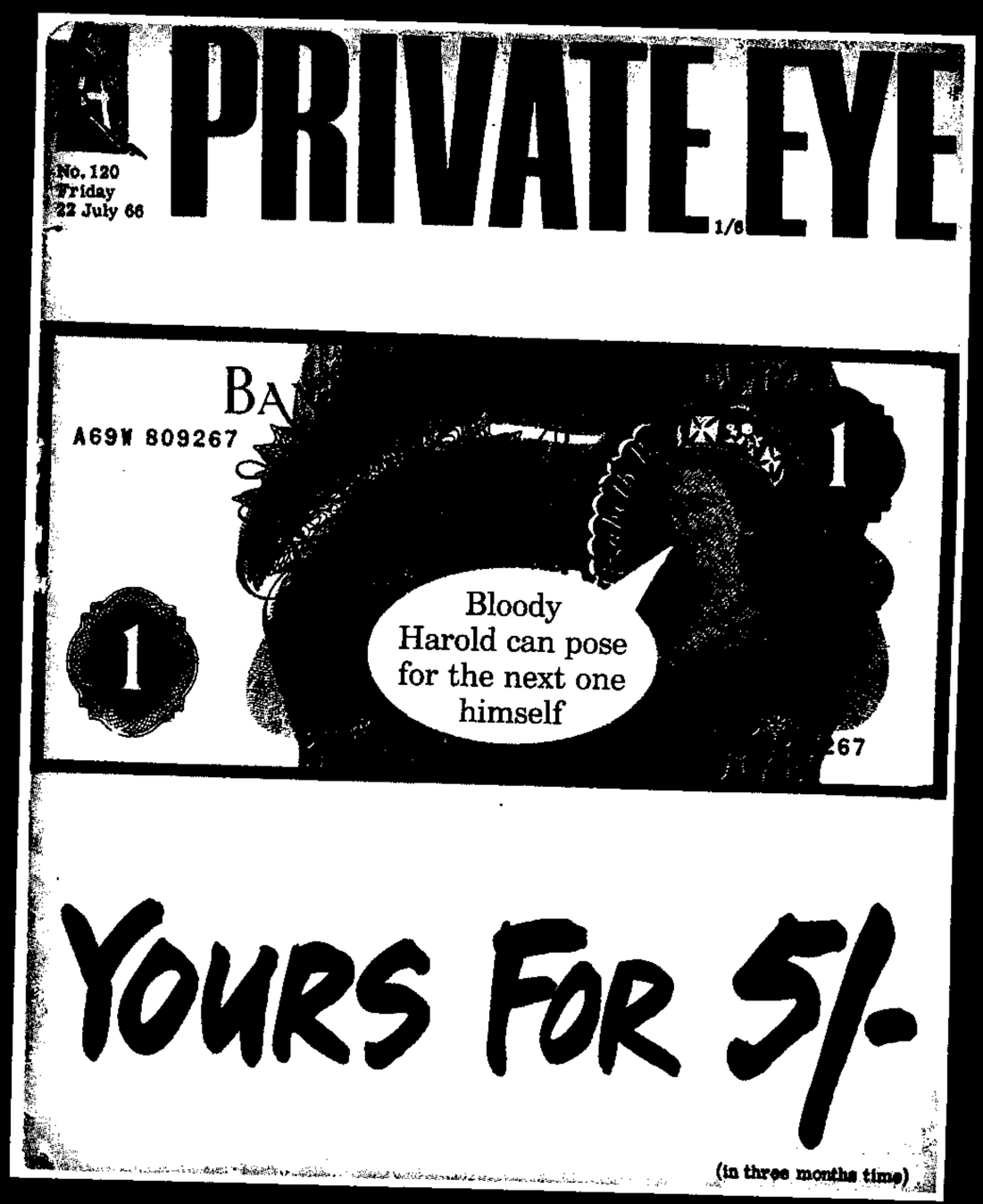
Private Eye's 8-page cut-out-'n'-throw-away souvenir to celebrate 50 glorious jokes

The Queen reads speech for Wilson's first Labour government

First Royal visit to Germany since the war



Wilson develops close ties with Royalty

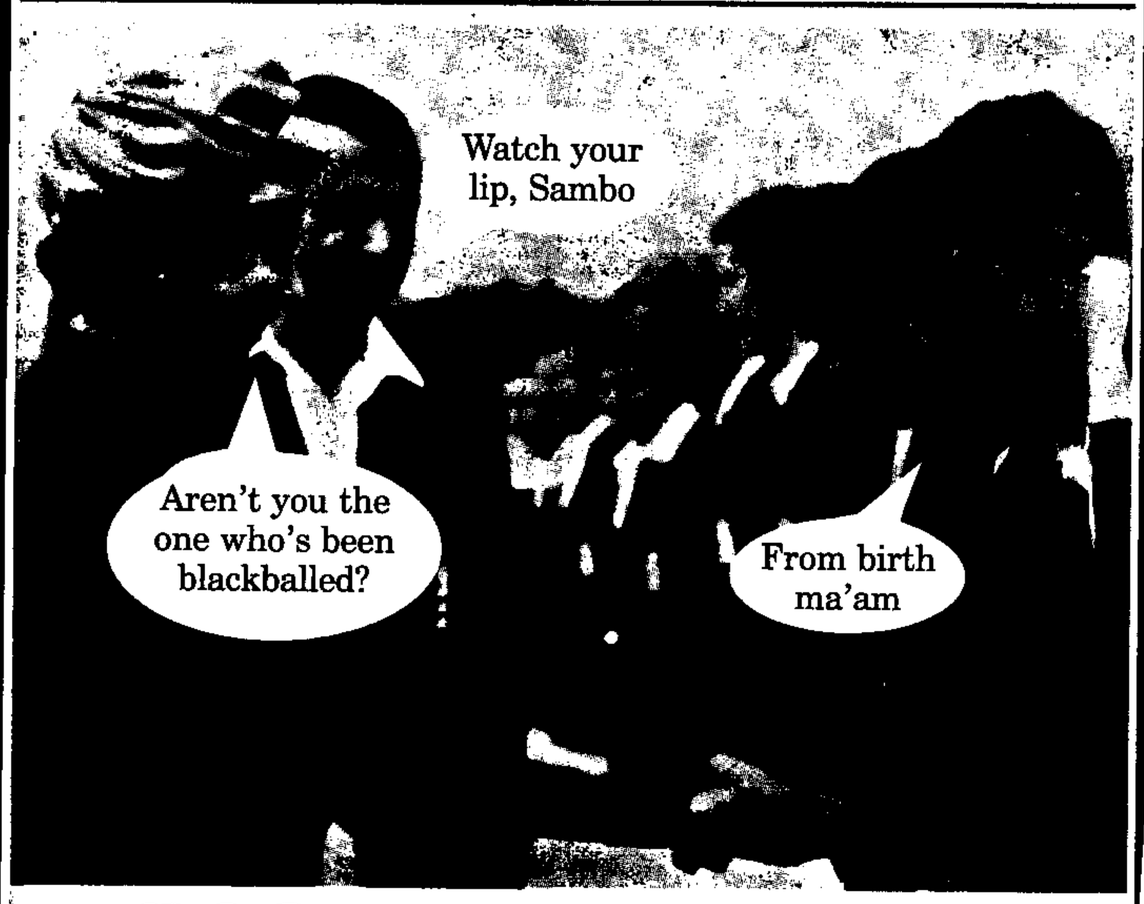


Wilson freezes prices and wages. Pound flounders

No. 176
Friday
13 Sept. '68

PRIVATE EYE

1/6



GOODBYE DOLLY !

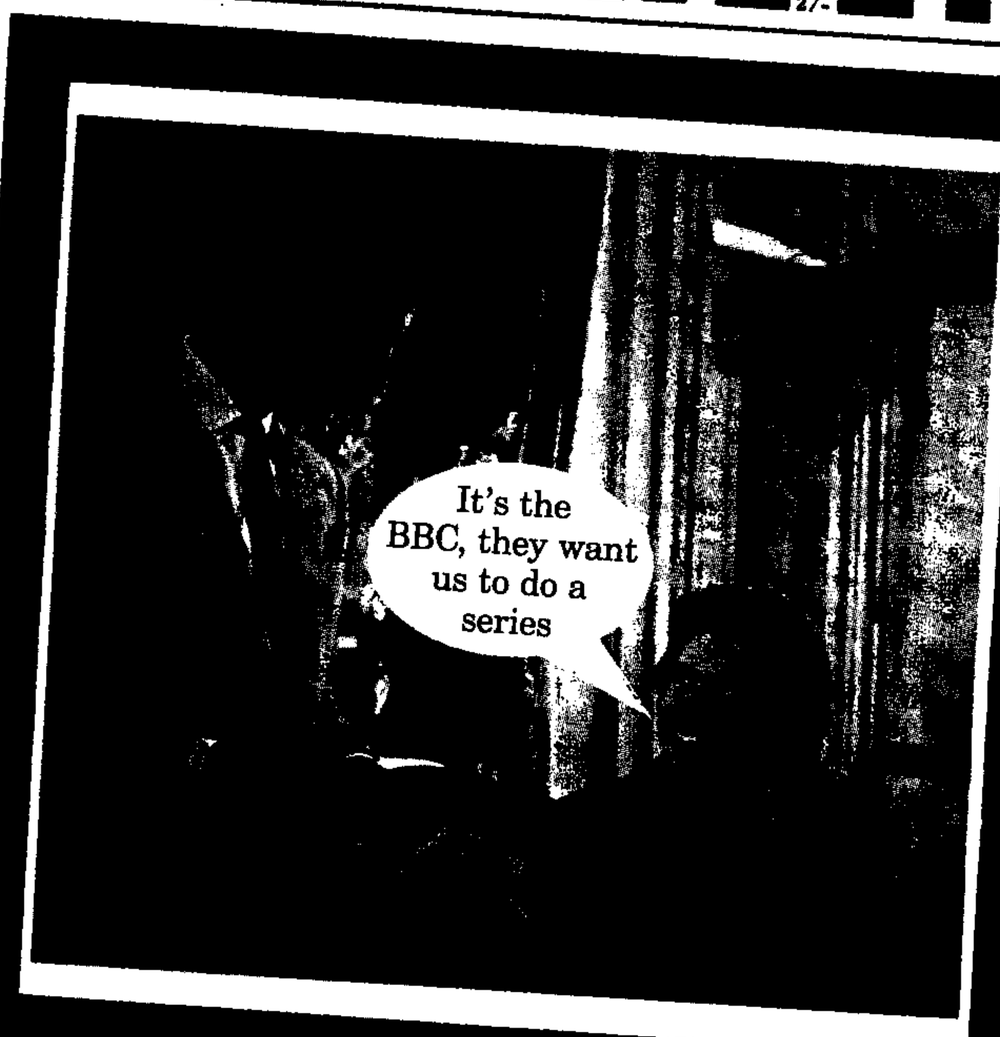
We must leave you out

Basil D'Oliveira dropped from MCC tour of South Africa

No. 197
Friday
4 July 69

PRIVATE EYE

2/-



The Queen is acclaimed for her performance in a television documentary

No. 371
Friday
5 March '76

PRIVATE EYE

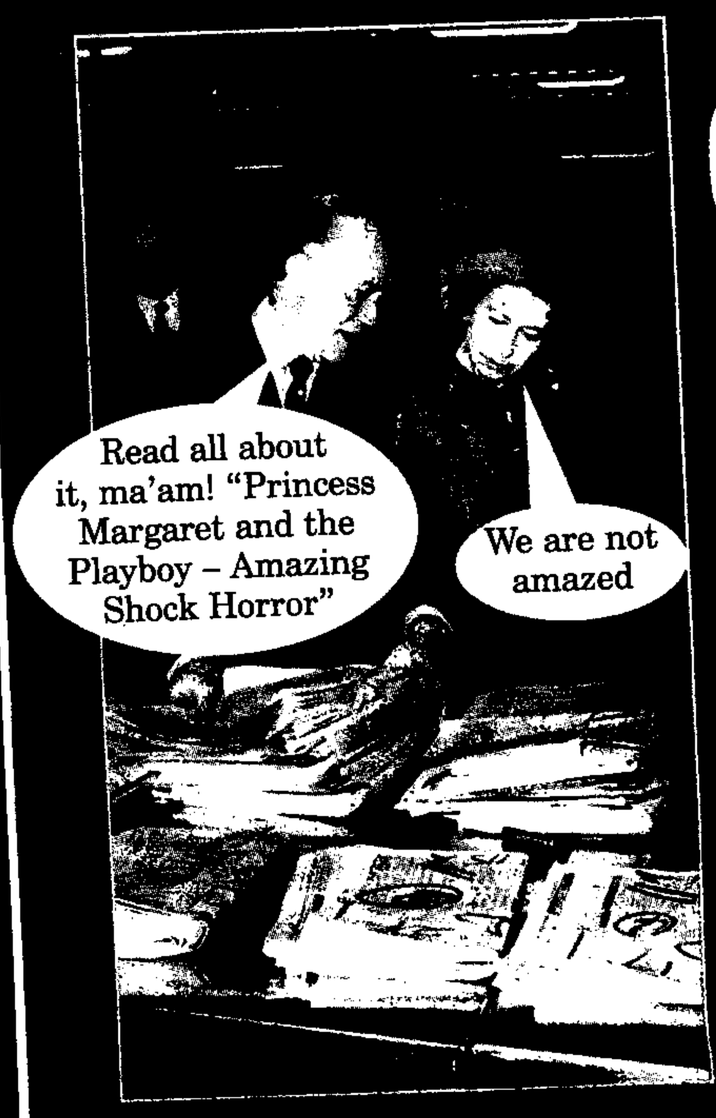
15p

BRITAIN SOLD SHOCK

New Man at Palace

Oil prices rise, Arabs courted by the West

QUEEN IN FLEET ST.

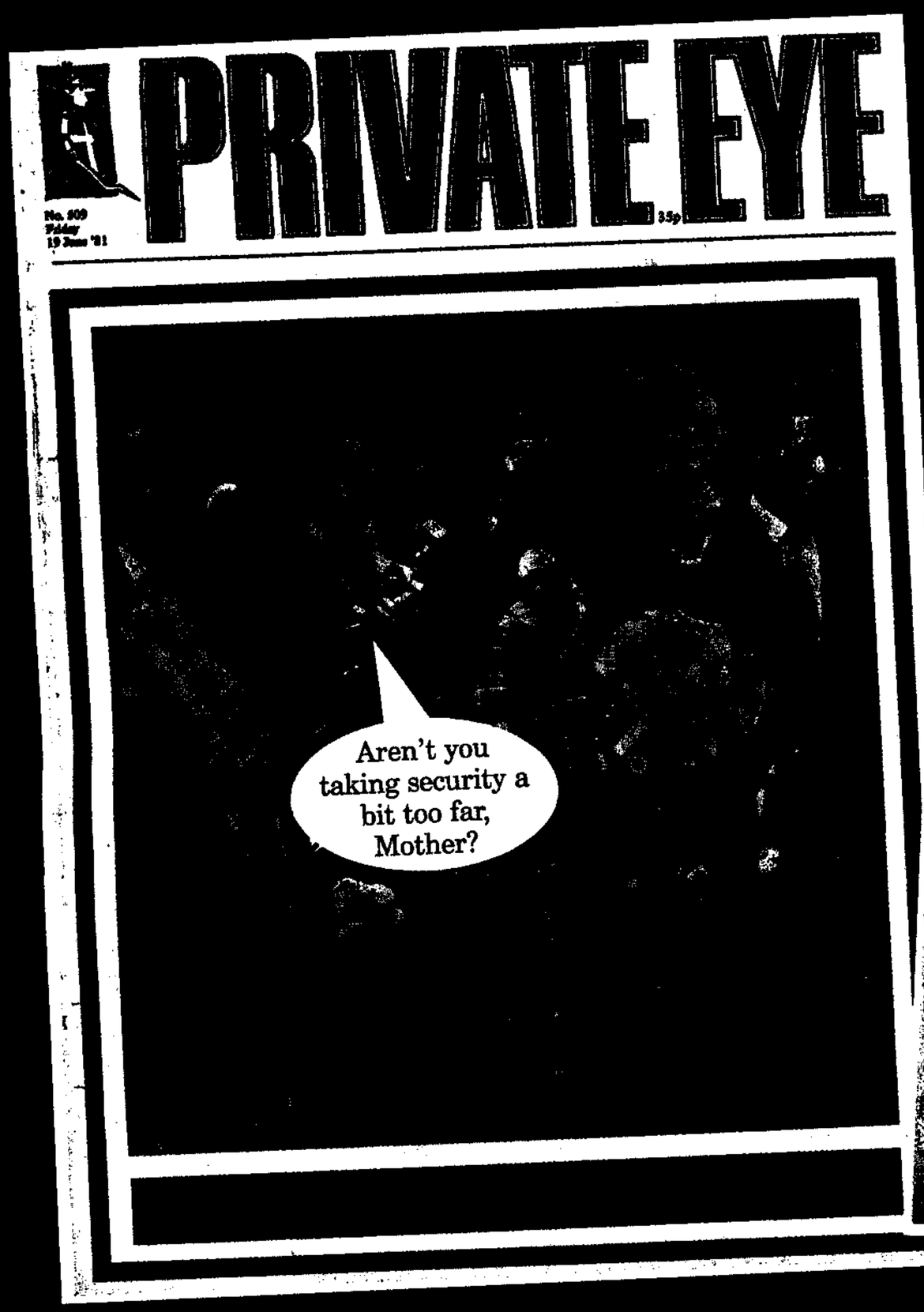


EXCLUSIVE PICTURE

Princess Margaret's private life becomes tabloid fodder

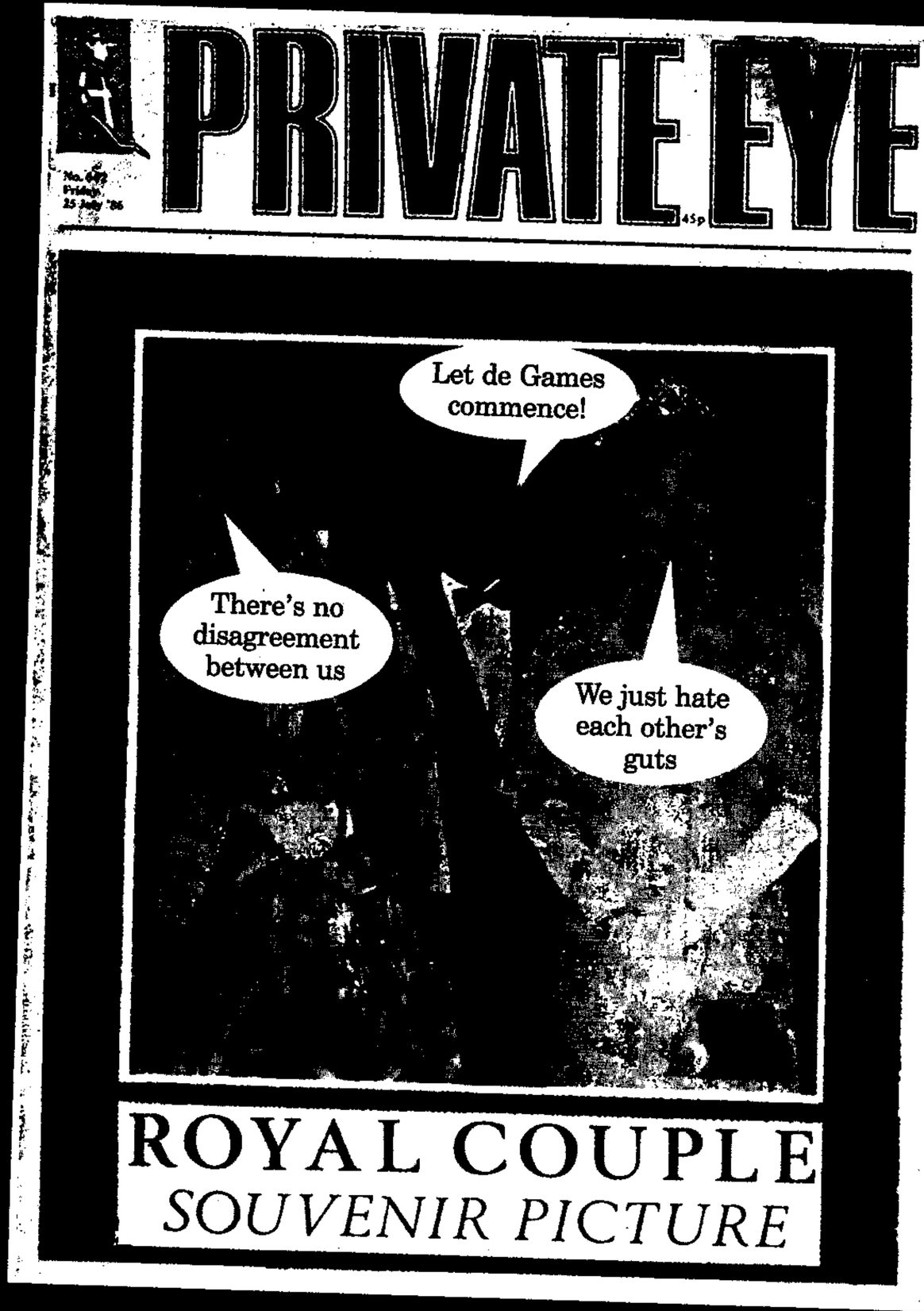
The Silver Jubilee

One-time Sergeant Bokassa crowns himself Emperor of the Central African Republic



Increased security measures for Royals

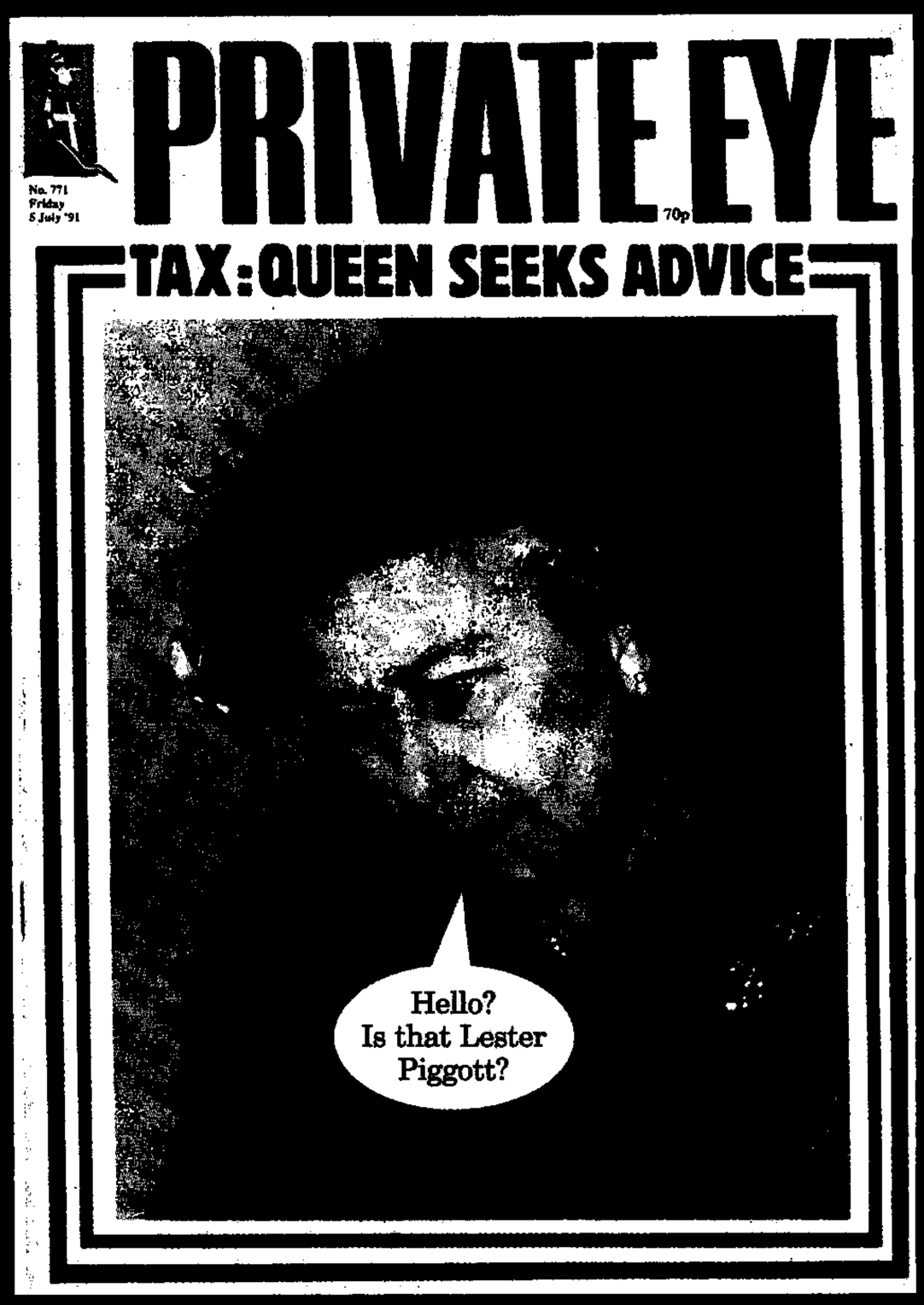
Barbara Cartland is not invited to the wedding of Prince Charles and her stepdaughter Lady Diana Spencer



Rivalry at the Commonwealth Games

Fergie's father, Major Ron, returns to Royal favour after unfortunate incident in a massage parlour

When Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu is overthrown and executed, Britain is reminded that the Queen awarded him the KCMG

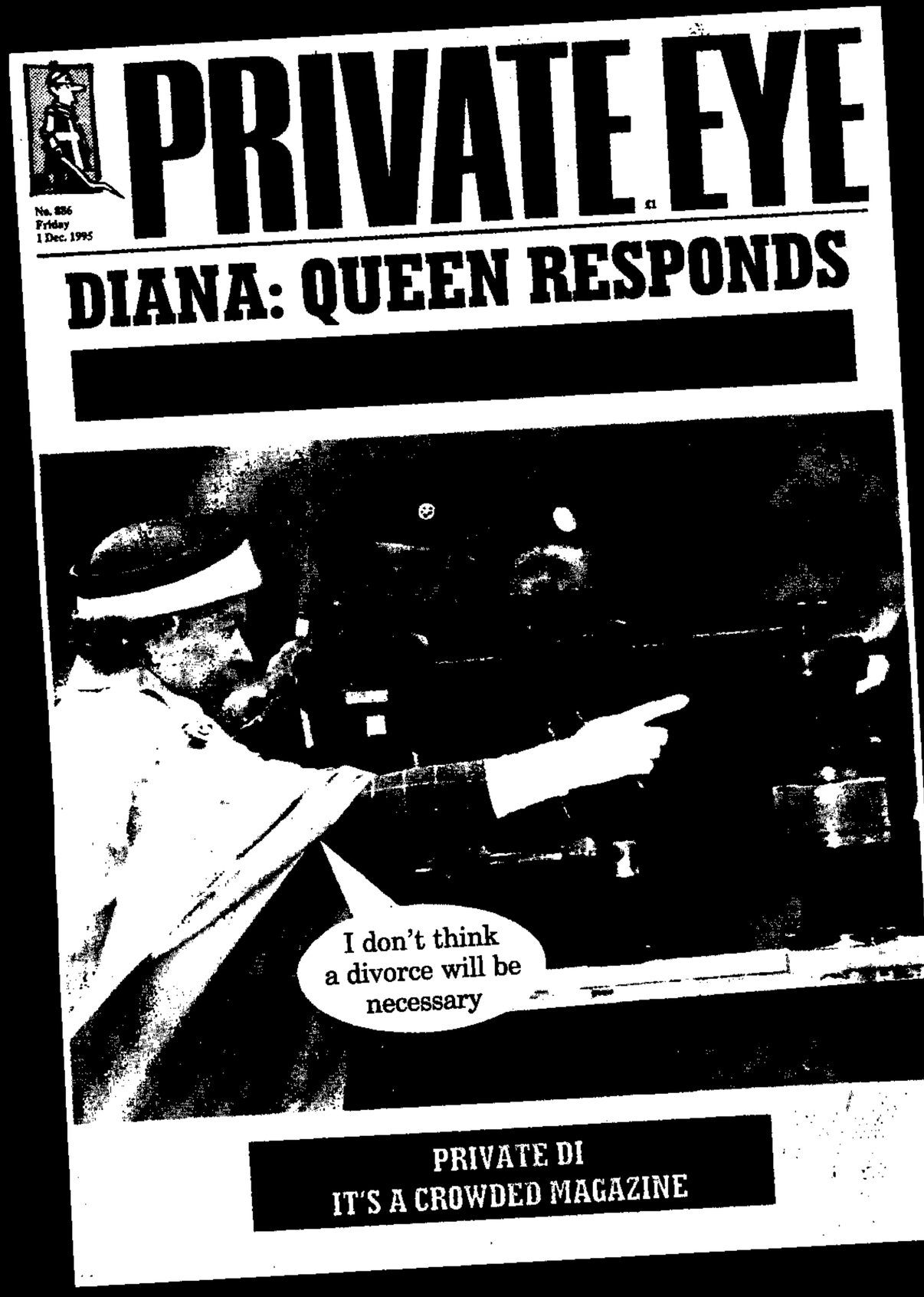


Income tax to be paid by Royals, Lester Piggott jailed for tax evasion

Royal style on tour of USA

PRIVATE EYE
HISTORY IS MADE
CHUNNEL OPEN!
We apologise for the late arrival of the 12.15 from Calais due to seaweed on the line
NEW £100 PRIZE CROSSWORD INSIDE

Channel Tunnel links the United Kingdom to France



Queen's response to Diana's *Panorama* interview

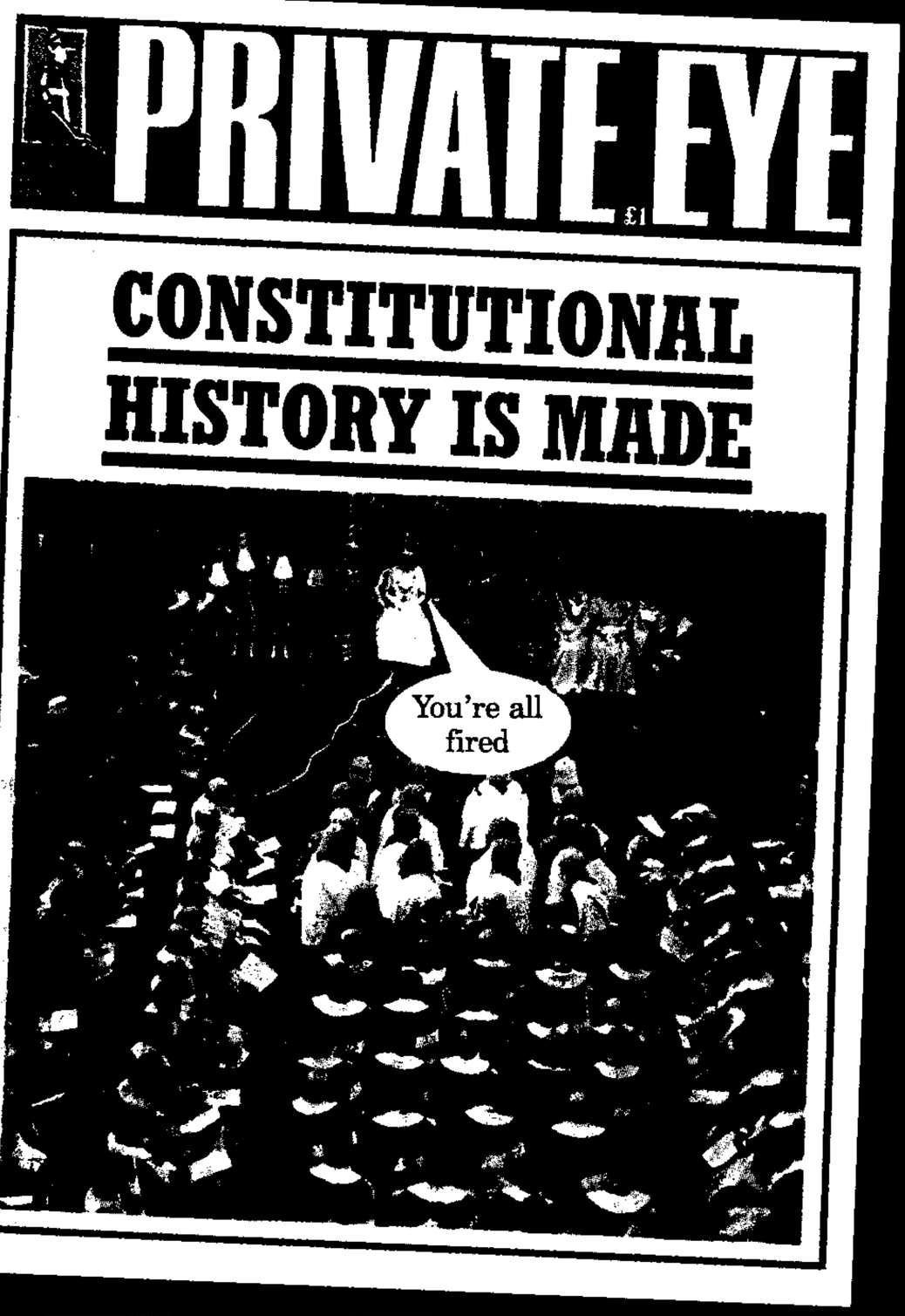
The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary

EYE PICTURE GALLERY

The Wilsons meet the Queen from *Mrs Wilson's Diary*. William Rushton, 1966

Queen meets Camilla Parker-Bowles, Prince Charles' long-term mistress

"Don't you think Blair is taking this common touch thing a bit far." Colin Whittock, 1997



House of Lords reformed

"They certainly try and give value for money these days." Martin Honeysett, 1994

Richard Jolley, 2001

"Someone once asked me why I married the Queen. And I replied 'Because she was there'." William Rushton, 1962

UP THE MALL, an everyday story of Royal folk. Ralph Steadman, 1969

"I wonder if the Americans would be interested in buying the Commonwealth?" Trog, 1966

Nicholas Bentley's view of The Family from *Auberon Waugh's Diary*, 1972

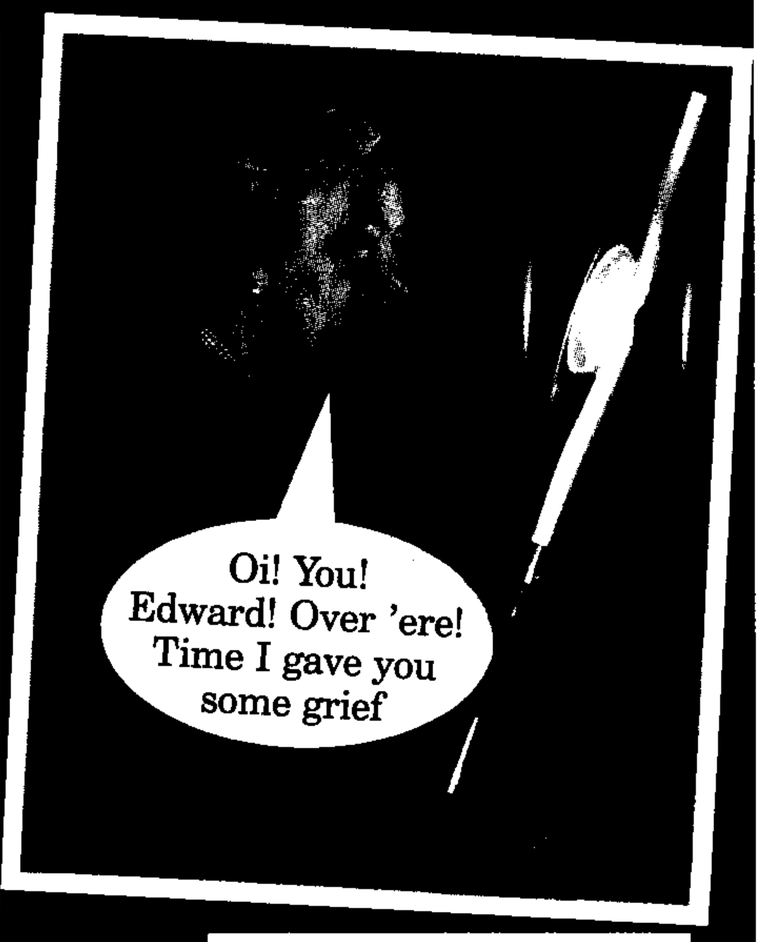
One big happy family from *Heir of Sorrows*. Gary Andrews, 1992

John Kent, 1992

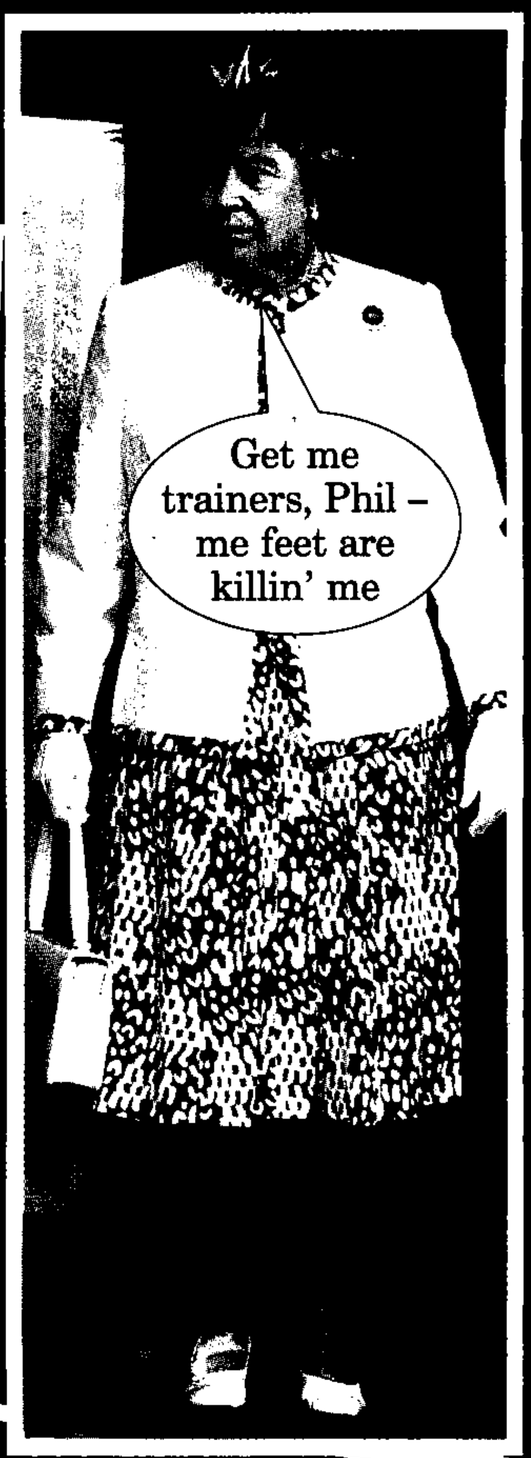
NEW-LOOK QUEEN

Private Eye's series of humble suggestions for a more modern up-to-date monarchy (1998-2001)

Queen Mother's £4 million overdraft is made public



Cameramen from Prince Edward's TV company, Ardent, are seen filming Prince William in breach of privacy agreement



The Queen entertains

New-look Livingstone – new-look Queen

Queen indicates that she will not abdicate

COUGH GETS TOUGH

Duncan Smith: Tory joke

by Our Political Staff **Benny Lin**

IN HIS most dramatic move since becoming the man no one's heard of *(surely "Leader of the Conservative Party"? Ed.)*, Iain Duncan Cough yesterday stamped his authority on the Tory Party by summarily sacking one of his most senior frontbenchers, Ann Witteron, the Shadow Minister of Fish.

No sooner had it been leaked to a Sunday newspaper that Mrs Widderspoon had told the worst joke ever recorded in the history of the world than Duncan Cough sprung into action.

This was the amazing minute-by-minute timetable of terror that rocked the Tory Party to its foundations.

Saturday

11.41pm Mrs Widmerpool is asked to draw the raffle prizes at the Congleton rugby club annual dinner and dance.

11.42 She regales drunken audience with world's worst joke.

11.43 Mr Ted Nargely uses mobile phone to ring through to the Sunday Mirror.

Sunday

9.00 am Sunday Mirror hits newstands with screaming headline "HUGE RACE ROW ROCKS TORIES: WILL COUGH ACT?"

10.15 Cough strolls down to village shop to purchase Sunday Telegraph and a bumper pack of throat lozenges (honey and menthol).

10.16 While perusing fascinating article by Dr Barkworth on the Single European Fish, Cough's eye strays to Sunday Mirror front page. He is horrified.

10.17 Cough begins frenzied round of calls to all his top advisers. "What do I do?" he asks.

11.20 Cough decides to act. He realises that this is the worst crisis to hit his party since Black Tuesday (the day William Hague wore a baseball cap). Firm intervention, he realises, is the only way to save his party.

12.30 Cough enjoys pre-lunch sherry with Mrs Cough while discussing next move.

1.00 Luncheon is served at Strepsil Manor while the Tory leader ponders the best course of action.

2.30 Cough enjoys Churchill-style power nap in front of quarter-finals of Embassy snooker.

3.00 Cough wakes from nap and springs into action. Asks Mrs Cough to put on kettle.

4.10 Refreshed by cup of Twinings Earl Grey and a handful of throat-soothing cherry-flavoured Zubes, cough nerves himself to bite the bullet.

4.11 Cough begins to mow lawn.

5.15 Cough remembers he hasn't yet dealt with Mrs Winterbottom. He re-enters house to ring Central Office for further advice.

5.30 He finally gets through to the weekend desk officer at Tory Central Office, who tells him "Don't worry, Mr Cough, it's all been taken care of. We put out a statement saying that you'd sacked her two hours ago."

5.31 Cough celebrates with cup of Lemsip and cracks open new packet of Tunes.

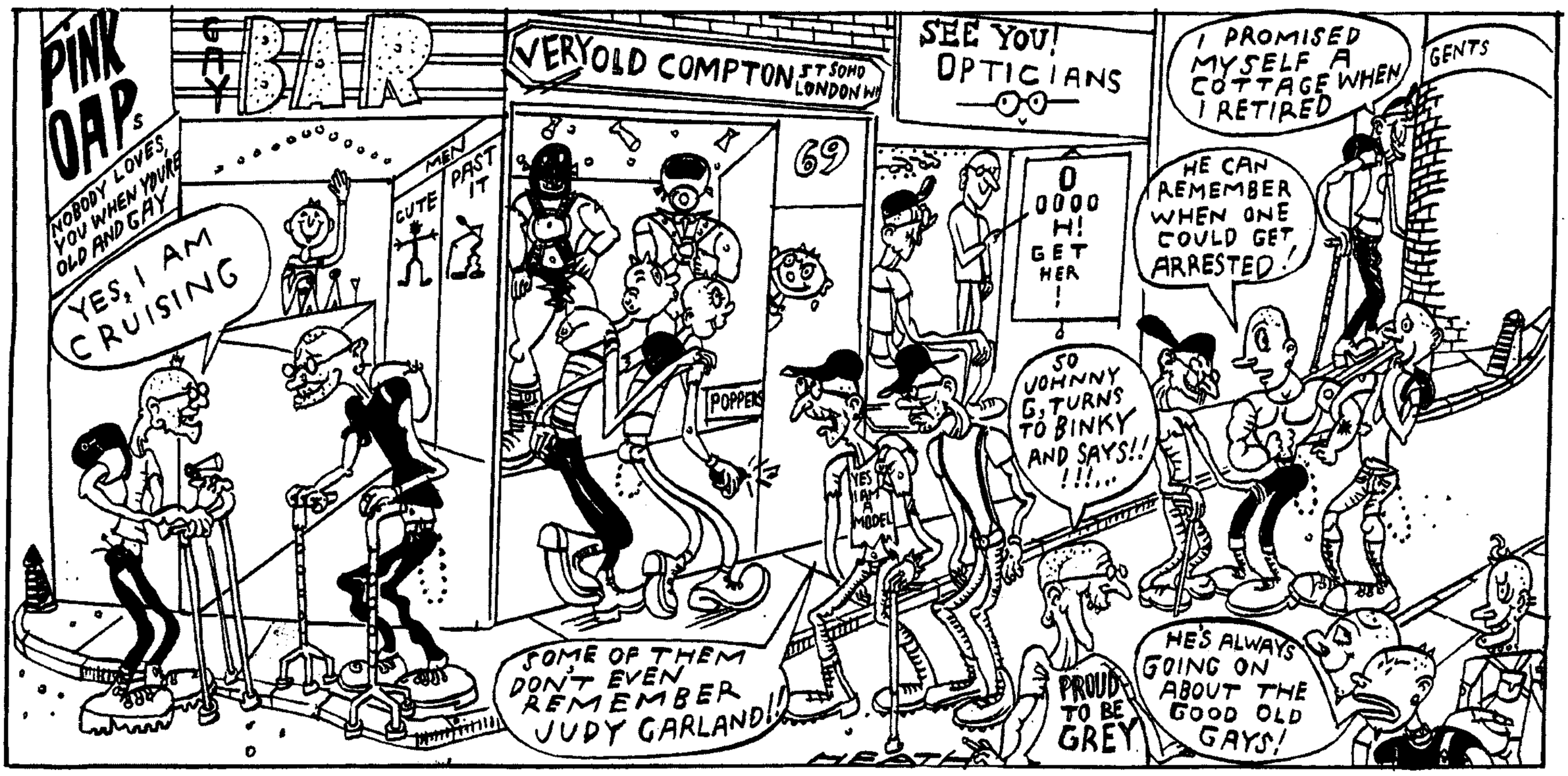
Monday

9.00 am Cough is delighted to read in his Daily Telegraph the headline "Action Man Cough Cracks Down On Tory Fascists".

What You Missed
THAT WINTERTON JOKE IN FULL

"There was a Cuban, a Japanese, an Irishman and a Pakistani, all stuck in a lift. Hang on, no I think I've got that wrong. Maybe it was an Irishman, a Jewish gentleman and a coloured person all sitting in a hot air balloon. Or was it a train? Anyway, one had to be thrown off. So they threw out the Pakistani chap, at least I think it was him, and the Englishman said... oh, I forgot to say that he was there too... he said, 'We've got to chuck out this Paki because there are too many of them coming over here and stealing all our jokes.' I think I've got that right. Or perhaps it was that they are selling balloons for 10p a penny. Anyway, it was very funny when I first heard it. But I'm afraid I'm not very good at telling jokes. I'm better at talking about fish, which is my job. Or at least it was until I told this joke."

(Taken from the Conservative Central Office Book of After-Dinner Jokes, with foreword by Lord Archer)


PINK OAPs
NOBODY LOVES YOU WHEN YOU'RE OLD AND GAY
GAY BAR
YES, I AM CRUISING
CUTE
MEN
PAST IT
VERYOLD COMPTON ST SOHO LONDON W1
69
POPPERS
SOME OF THEM DON'T EVEN REMEMBER JUDY GARLAND!!
SEE YOU! OPTICIANS
O OOOO H! GET HER!
YES I AM A MODEL
SO JOHNNY G, TURNS TO BINKY AND SAYS!! !!...
PROUD TO BE GREY
I PROMISED MYSELF A COTTAGE WHEN I RETIRED
GENTS
HE CAN REMEMBER WHEN ONE COULD GET ARRESTED!
HE'S ALWAYS GOING ON ABOUT THE GOOD OLD GAYS!

THE BOOK OF SHARON

Chapter 94

1. And lo, it came to pass at the Feast of the Passover that an Hamas-ite came privily unto the tents of the children of Israel, while they sat at meat, and did slay them all, even unto himself.

2. And among the children of Israel there were slain both man and woman, old and young alike.

3. And when he heard it, Sharon waxed terrible in his wrath, and rent his garments, saying "Woe unto the Araf-ites and the Hamas-ites and the Hez-bollites."

4. "Verily, I say, this time they have goneth too far."

5. Then Shar-on rose up and summoned his hosts and his chariots of fire, and sayeth unto them "Go forth, even unto the city of Jen-in and lay it waste."

6. "For I tell you that only when one stone shall not remain upon another shall peace be brought to the land of Israel."

7. Then went they forth at his bidding, and did as he had commanded, crying out, "All these things we do we are doing in the name of peace."

8. And first they visited upon the city of Jen-in a terrible plague of fire and brimstone, so that many of the Araf-ites and Hamas-ites were slain, even men, women and children. And among the Arab-ites there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth.

9. And it was as Shar-on had commanded, so that by nightfall the city of Jen-in was laid waste, so that not one stone remained upon another.

10. And those that stood by and gazed upon that place likened it unto a desert beset by a plague of locusts where not even the cockatrice hath a place to lay its young in the dust.

11. Or like unto the sands of Eilat when the makers of holiday have departed and have decided to go somewhere safer this year even unto the place called Tur-key or possibly Du-bai.

12. Then Sharon rejoiced and said unto the children of Israel, "See how I have slain all our enemies, the Hamas-ites and the Araf-ites and the Hezboll-ites, and all those who seek to destroy us and our children and our children's children."

13. "Thus have I done as I promised you, and brought peace at last to the land of Israel."

14. And, indeed, it came to pass that for a short while there was silence in the land, and it looketh to Shar-on that this had doneth the trick.

15. But, lo, even as ye have guessed, it came to pass that another Hamas-ite came privily to the tents of the children of Israel, to slay them in the place that is called Snoo-ker.

16. And thus it was, even as the prophet had foretold, that it was back to the square that is called one. *(To be continued for ever)*

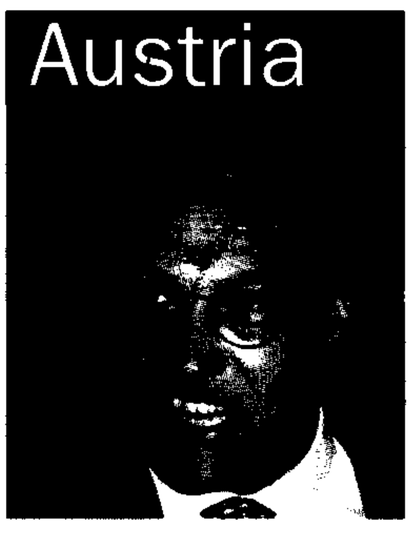
WHO ARE THEY

The New Wave of Far-Right Loonies Who Are Taking Over Europe?

France

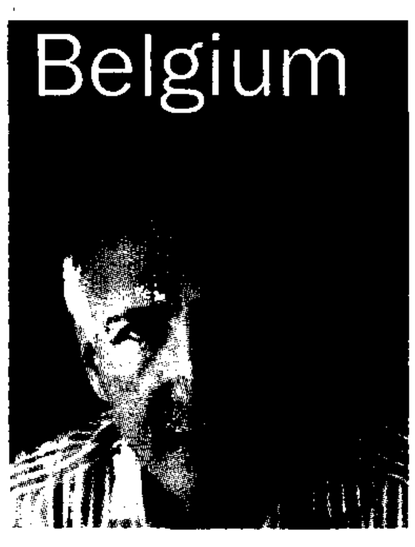
■ **Jean-Marie Le Sven** came close to toppling President Chirac in a nail-biting 83-17 percent finish. Le Pen's near-victory has traumatised the French *people who fear* that the sound of jackboots down the Champs Elysées can only be a matter of months away.

Austria



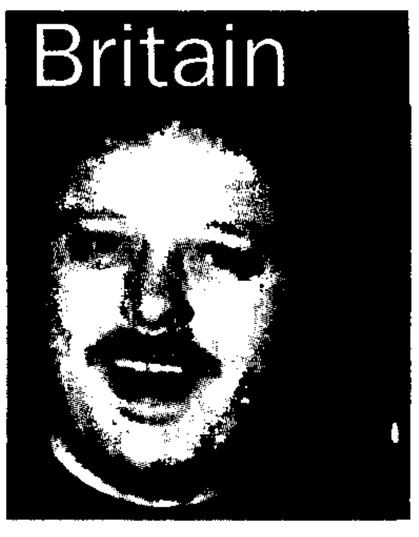
■ **Jorge Hidler**, ruthless leader of the far-right "Say No To The Euro" Party, has already taken his first giant step towards seizing supreme power by becoming mayor of the key village of Bad Horstwessel. His meteoric advance has traumatised the Austrian people who fear that their beloved Blue Danube will soon be running red with the blood of innocent victims.

Belgium



■ **Simon van der Hefferlump**, leader of the far-right Flemish Nationalist Dailimael Party, has already taken a giant leap towards seizing supreme power by winning three seats in the recent Bruges municipal elections. Van der Hefferlump recently told his screaming followers (Sid and Doris Oranje-boom), "Today Bruges, tomorrow Antwerp..." The traumatised Belgian people are already hiding in their attics for fear of the advancing Swastika hordes.

Britain



■ **Brian Snott**, charismatic leader of the far-right British Anorak Party, has already swept to power by winning 3 votes in the recent elections for the Heckmondwyke parish council. A traumatised Britain is waiting in terror as Millwall supporters rampage through the streets in a shock tidal-wave of violence and thuggery. *(That's enough right-wing hysteria. Ed.)*

DIARY

BEN ELTON

Hey, baby, baby, ba-a-a-by – let's ROCK! Magic words. Truly magical, magic words.

And that's the truly wonderful solid-gold hey-guys-let's-get-up-'n'-boogie true spirit of rock 'n' roll I'm aiming to capture in "We Will We Will Rock You!", the new mega-musical I've written with and about the legendary collective genius that is Queen.

But don't get me wrong. When I employ the word "baby" in this context, I have no intention whatever of using the word in a derogatory or demeaning sense, or as any sort of sexist put-down of the female of the species, for whom frankly I have and will continue to have the very greatest respect.

"Baby" is merely the term I use to conjure up the wondrous innocence of a bygone age – not that I think that this particular bygone age was necessarily innocent, or that the world has not progressed in terms of tolerance, social equality and mutual respect since those dark days in the 1950s of food rationing, tuberculosis and Conservative rule.

Not that I am criticising those who choose to use "baby" in this sense, I hasten to add. That is purely a matter for them and their consciences. And please let's not forget that "baby" also means a very very young child.

And I'm going to stick my neck out here and tell you something I believe in most definitely: *no single creature on this crazy war-torn planet is as beautiful or as innocent as a new-born baby child.*

Rock and pop has always been a big part of my life. And for breadth, depth, scale and sheer unadulterated joy, to my mind nothing beats the sheer magic that is Queen.

There are so many solid gold Queen hits to chose from. Bohemian Rhapsody. Another One Bites the Dust. Radio Gaga. Bohemian Rhapsody. Another One Bites the Dust. Bohemian Rhapsody. Radio Gaga. And – to my mind perhaps greatest of all – the immortal Bohemian Rhapsody.

Truly classic sounds, loved by men and women of all races the world over. And – blimey O'Riley – (no offence to my very good friends the Irish people, who have already suffered one helluva lot during their long and chequered history) what totally unforgettable lyrics!

"Scaramouche, Scaramouche, will you do the fandango
Thunderbolt and lightning – very very frightening me
Oh me, oh me, oh meeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
Galileo, Galileo, Galileo, Galileo
I will not let you go, let me go, I will not let you go, let me go, I will not let you go, let me go, I will not let you go, let me go, go, go"

These lyrics belong to all of us. They are part of our life stories. People know them like they know their own mothers. And I have the greatest of respect for all mothers, who do a hell of a difficult job under truly difficult circumstances for little if any reward. They may not always know what these lyrics are about, but they know they mean something, even if it is something they don't know the meaning of, because the words mean different things to different people at different times, or indeed nothing at all to anyone at any time – and that, my friend, is their genius.

How to turn this solid gold work of genius into a dazzling* rockin' and rollin' new musical? Believe me, I grappled with the sheer immensity of this problem for many, many minutes before coming up with the solution. "We Will We Will Rock You!" is a futuristic fantasy, an epic battle between a group of rebels and the forces of pop homogenisation that have come to dominate the planet.

I know what you're gonna think. You're gonna think it is an attack on the fashion for manufactured pop. Natch. Well, I respect your right to think that, but the simple fact is that it is not – though it does, I hope, contain pertinent though well-intentioned and hopefully constructive criticism of some minor aspects of the music business.

I have always maintained that satire is at its best when it is able to celebrate its target, to take the broader view and say, "Hey, perhaps it's not one hundred and one per cent perfect – but, c'mon, guys, it's pretty damn good all the same!"

Looking back, this is what my youthful "attacks" on La Thatch were all about. I didn't approve of the lady's politics – no way, Jose!** But I had a great deal of respect for the way she struggled against the largely male establishment – and often, mind, against our old friend (or rather enemy!) the forces of globalisation – to release this country from the stranglehold of union rule and high taxes, and to liberate solid gold creative talents such as the mighty Lloyd Webber who were not afraid to test their worth in the marketplace. So, no, my political position has not changed since my Thatch-bashing days – and I will continue to slag off, in my own inimitable way (!), those who try to undermine the spirit of free enterprise in this once-great country of ours. That's 'nuff political gear for now, friends – let's boogie!

Kylie Minogue – great entertainer. The Spice Girls – a truly legendary conglomeration of talents. Pete Waterman – the guy's a legend. Gareth Gates – there'll always be a valued place in Pop Music for a young man of his undoubted ability. So by celebrating the towering Shakespearian achievements of the four brilliant and uncompromising artistes who were – and will always be – Queen, I am not intending to diss the rest. So, friends, let's raise a glass*** to everyone in the music industry – and let's ROCK!

* Though the new musical employs a truly fabulous light show, I would like to stress at this point I have no wish to further endanger the already dangerously depleting levels of energy on this or any other planet through reckless over-use of electricity and lightbulbs. For this reason, I have tried to keep the show's dazzle to a basic minimum, whilst bearing in mind the quite justified expectations of a West End audience (or any other audience, for that matter – please let's never forget that a great many hardworking folk live many, many hundreds of miles from the centre of London, and will only be able to get to the show when it tours closer to their own, often severely under-resourced, localities, bless them).

** This colloquialism is in no way intended as a slight on the Spanish, or Latin-American community, whose many notable achievements have my total respect, Pinochet and his murderous henchmen excluded.

*** Alcohol can indeed be pleasurable if consumed in moderation. Having said that, I will continue to exercise very great respect for those in the teetotal community.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

THE LATE SEVENTIES WERE LIKE TOTALLY CRAZY TIMES FOR ME...
I WAS IN BETWEEN MARRIAGES AND HITTING THE BOOZE AND DRUGS BIG TIME...
I'D GO OUT EVERY NIGHT ALL NIGHT AND JUST PARTY TILL I DROPPED.
SO YOU WERE PARTYING FOR ENGLAND, EH, GARY?
NO. MONACO. I WAS A TAX EXILE AT THE TIME...

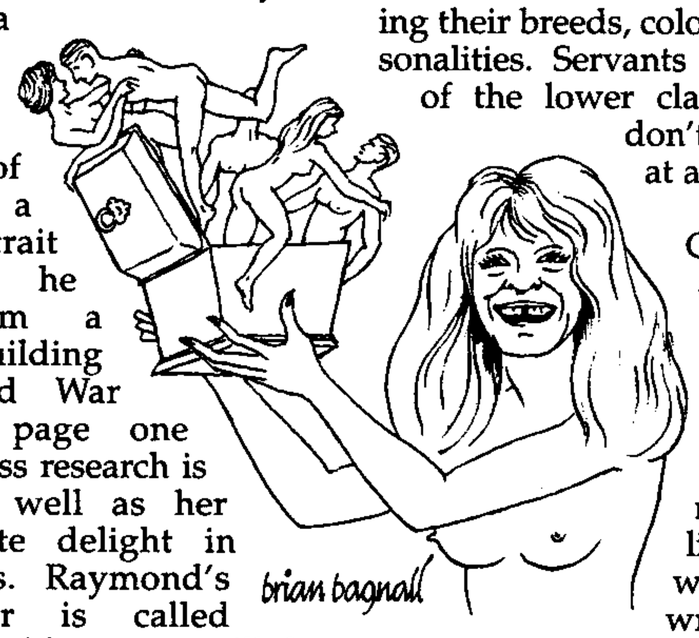
Literary Review

Like dogs? You'll love this one

Pandora
Jilly Cooper
(Bantam Press, £17.99)

OCEANS of cash flow in at the mere rumour of a new Cooper novel, on the strict understanding that it will be exactly like all the previous ones. Other novelists make a few changes but Cooper continues undaunted: her novels are exactly what they were, almost to the adverb. *Pandora* may be "about" the art world, but in reality it's *Riders VII*; and neither her publishers, her booksellers (£4 off at Waterstone's) or her readers (middle-aged women who like dogs) would have it any other way.

So we have Raymond Belvedon, fantastically rich and handsome owner of the Belvedon Gallery in Cork Street, a man with morals, scruples, large numbers of children and a Raphael portrait of Pandora he rescued from a burning building during World War Two. From page one Cooper's tireless research is apparent, as well as her almost infinite delight in stupid names. Raymond's dead brother is called Viridian; his oldest son will be Jupiter and there are Alizarins, Xaviers, Caradocs and Taggies to come.



Only P.D. James of modern authors is so in thrall to the eccentric naming habits of the upper classes; only Simon Raven of recent memory could have trumped them both. Only Raymond gets a name like Raymond, but as consolation he is effortlessly good at everything he tries and loved by all. He has only lost his temper once, when someone accidentally shot a dog — the gravest of all crimes in the Cooper canon. Non-aligned readers will hate him with a passion from about page 15.

As always in Cooper, though, characters are either very very good or very very bad. Horrible characters are greedy or highly sexed or homosexual or called Kevin and therefore lower class. Nice characters, even when they say or do something horrible, say or do it "kindly". Mere readers are not given room to make their own judgements about the characters — Jilly has already made them for you.

Even if her adverbs don't do it, her nicknames are sure to. Somerford Keynes, roaring art critic of the *Daily Post* (who might he be based on then?), is "nicknamed the Poisoned Pansy because of his lethal reviews". General Aldridge, the lord lieutenant of Larkshire, is "so boring he's known locally as General Anaesthetic". This latter, which may or may not be a joke, comes from the dramatis personae, which occupy five full pages. Then there's another page listing the 12 named animals in the book, detailing their breeds, colouring and personalities. Servants and members of the lower classes generally don't get a mention at all.

What can Cooper write about next? She's done showjumping and polo and classical music and now art, and like all sensible writers she writes about what she knows, which probably rules out football and reggae. (Imagine the latter: Old Etonian skankin' superstar Arbuthnot Marley must decide which of his 73 children to leave his huge ganga-based fortune to, until villainous but dashing bass guitarist Heroditus ffolkes-ffolkes turns up, claiming to be the missing 74th. . .)

In defence of this unreadable book, it's not supposed to be taken seriously. Laugh and the world laughs with you. But Cooper's cheerfulness is of the crazed and gritted teeth variety that insists you keep on smiling whatever other disasters may be going on around you. Accordingly there's a terrible anxiety about the book, a desperation not to engage with real life in any way, although the sex scenes certainly engage with the realities of modern publishing. The set pieces creak; the characters don't convince for a second. And the dog worship would make even Carla Lane throw up. Cooper thanks 186 people in her acknowledgements, as well as six pets and the MCC, which may give a clue to the working title of *Riders VIII. Googly*, maybe, or possibly *Bouncer*...

The future's trite, the future's. . .

Orange Prize

SEVEN years on the road now, and still drenched in the glare of book-trade publicity, the Orange Prize continues to offer the neatest demonstration yet of the pitfalls awaiting the organisers of the average literary award.

Never mind the official separatism on which the thing is predicated (blokes needn't apply) or even the unofficial separatism that reduces its catchment area still further (big-shots like A.S. Byatt and Anita Brookner remain daintily aloof) – nobody has yet applied their minds to the central dilemma facing book prizes in this country. This might be defined as: do we support literature or do we make a splash?

Early incarnations of the Orange Prize tried hard to do both. The first one, back in 1996, was won by the blondely photogenic Helen Dunmore, with heavyweights such as Amy Tan and Ann Tyler on the shortlist. 1997 saw the Canadian novelist Anne Michaels lift the swag, with subsidiary appearances from Annie Proulx and Margaret Attwood.

Thereafter the shortlist turned more upper-brow and less hospitable to glam overseas entrants, a process culminating in this year's immensely stodgy selection, full of charitable gestures (Helen Dunmore, again, with *The Siege*, which failed to win anything when it came out last year) and worthy "issue" stuff such as Maggie Gee's *The White Family*, a novel about racism featuring a family called – no, I'm not making this up – White.

The mewing noises from the lower reaches of the book-trade when faced with a shortlist containing perhaps two saleable items have, of course, been piteous to hear. The general opinion, as canvassed by the *Bookseller*, seemed to be that the prize was getting all highbrow, while in addition – this from someone in Ottaker's Glasgow branch – "a southern-based prize and quite literary".

Literary. . . such a dreadful word when applied to books, is it not? But then, to return to the dilemma stated above, what function does a books prize exist to fulfil? Reward merit or cheer everybody up? If the top six books eligible for the Orange Prize turn out to be southern and literary then what is the solution? Simply haul in stuff that the punters might have heard of? Exactly the same kind of whingeing is heard each autumn when the Booker shortlist appears – dark mutterings to the effect that Salman or Ian or Mart's absence will be bad for trade and the event's profile. But short of getting Salman, Ian and Mart to write better books, there is not a great deal one can do.

And as the Orange Prize committee furrows its collective brow over the sad fact that no one is the slightest bit interested in this year's shortlist, the Booker, too, is going through a nervous bout of self-examination. With a £2.5m sponsorship deal newly banked, courtesy of the Man Group, described as "an alternative investment fund manager and broker", there are plans to take in parallel prizes in America and Europe (why, exactly?) while the BBC is thought to be keen to shift the ceremony from the Guildhall to "a more camera-friendly location". We get the idea: more glam, more razzmatazz, and a determined attempt to bring in some contenders the broadsheet newspapers have heard of.

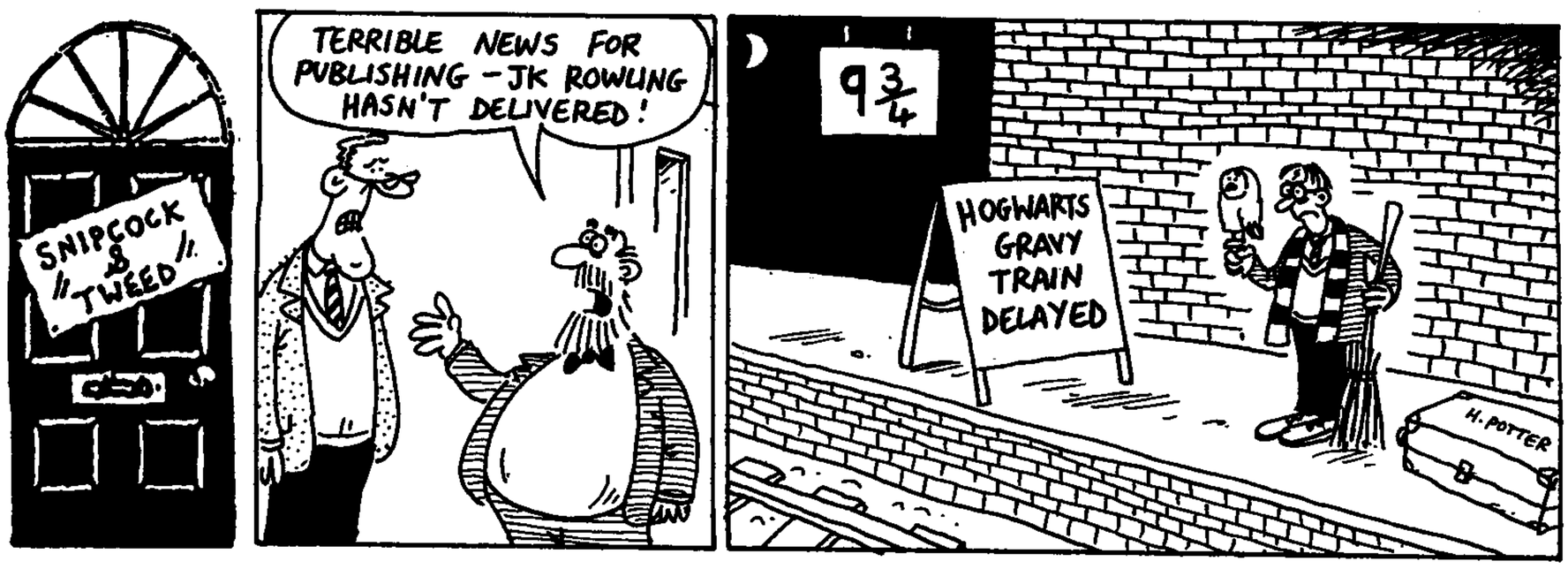
If the sponsors of the Orange, or the Booker, or indeed any other of our literary prizes, really wanted to help literature, as opposed to providing an opportunity for self-congratulation, they could start by dispensing bursaries to deserving young talent or pensions to the throng of fiftysomethings on whom the majority of commercial publishers have simply given up.

Sadly, the search for decent camera angles and the chance to hook in the European media will *always* take precedence. Meanwhile, let us hope that Maggie Gee's novel – published by an obscure West London press and sparsely distributed around the country's bookshops — scoops this year's Orange Prize. If nothing else, it would serve the book-trade and the publishing establishment right.

Books & Bookmen

■ HMV Media chief exec Alan "Weasel" Giles has trumpeted proudly that the share issue will make stakeholders of the group employees, including those at beleaguered bookseller Waterstone's, with each worker receiving £200-worth of shares. But the generosity is undermined by conditions imposed by HMV and at Waterstone's.

To claim the shares employees must still be with the company one year after the issue. But quite a few booksellers won't be around. Giles



is about to announce a massive tranche of redundancies, with 60 assistant managers to go. This is bad news: almost all of the chain's stores are already running with what one employee calls "skeleton staff". The future is also uncertain for the few regional managers who survived the recent sackings. Rumours suggest they are to be replaced by new faces from elsewhere in the retail trade.

Those lucky enough to stay will have to wait *three* years before being able to cash in their windfall, by which time who knows how much the shares will be worth? The Weasel is confident that the few who can realise their holdings won't be disappointed. In an idiot sheet issued to staff about the flotation, he argued that the "company should be financially stronger" as a result. Meanwhile, money that could be spent on saving jobs is going on a new logo and name for the company — EMI presumably wanting to keep its HMV trademark to itself once it sells out.

■ THE malaise at Waterstone's hasn't deterred a new entrant into the bookselling scene: Andrew Malcolm, the scourge of OUP (see *Eyes passim*), who has leased a shop in a prime site opposite Blackwell's in Broad Street, Oxford.

Trading as AKME Expression, he stocks only two books: *Making Names*, the philosophy text accepted and then rejected by OUP and which led to a six-year legal battle in which Malcolm sued for breach of contract; and *The Remedy*, his account of the whole affair.

Part of the original settlement was a commitment on the part of OUP not to make "any derogatory statements" about Malcolm or his work. Last year Henry Hardy, the editor who commissioned the book, wrote a laudatory review of *The Remedy* in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, eliciting a letter from Dr Alan Ryan, the academic who first backed, then rejected *Making Names*, describing the book as "coarse and jeering".

Whatever the merits of the work, Malcolm took this to be a breach of the agreement and sued Oxford. The University claimed "freedom of expression" and argued that Ryan was not a "servant or agent" of the University — a curious position for the warden of New College — and could thus say whatever he liked. The high court found in favour of OUP and Malcolm was ordered to pay £12,500 costs.

Initially he offered the money on condition it was used to set up a chair in publishing law; but this was rebuffed by Oxford's lawyers. So he is now selling his books and a host of spoof qualifications, as well as offering vast window displays explaining OUP's many transgressions — not least its spurious charitable status and tax exemption.

REMAINDERS OF THE DAY

■ *FOURPLAY* by Jane Moore was the debut novel by the *Sun* and *News of the Screws* columnist, acquired by Jane Wood at Orion for a sum well into six figures.

It was hyped breathlessly with the aid of a *Hello*-friendly party at the Ivy, with guests including Noel Edmonds, Ross "Grant Mitchell" Kemp and Anthea Turner, who knows a bit about literary success. It went on sale at £5.99 and now can be had for a quid in the Waterstone's sale.

'Bookworm'

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Martin Amis's script for the forthcoming Miramax "romantic comedy" production of *Northanger Abbey*...

Scene: Bath, exterior, day. Wind ceaselessly crazes the frightening trees, etc. A carriage bowls friskily into view. Within, Miss Catherine Morland and friend, in torpid transit.

MISS M (*pertly adjusts bonnet*): How do I look?

FRIEND: Babelocious.

MISS M (*inspects cleavage*): Jesus! If this doesn't drag the animal to the party I'll freak. Period.

FRIEND: Tilney? He's cool. But, like, insane. And the old guy — is he ever weird?

MISS M: Whatever. You like Britney Spears best, or Celine Dion?

(*They amuse themselves playing whist or some other pretty period diversion. CUT TO Northanger Abbey. Bats privily prowl. Deer surreptitiously stalk, etc.*)

GENERAL TILNEY: This chick Morland, is she pissing me off or what?

TILNEY: The *fuck*?

GENERAL TILNEY: There's no bread. I made them run a computer check. Plus she reckons I offed your ma. Does that sound like a good deal?

TILNEY: You're breaking my heart, dad.

GENERAL TILNEY: You young guys got no respect.

(*They armwrestle playfully on carpet. Butler, housemaids etc look raptly on. CUT TO Morland household, exterior, night. Ring at door.*)

MISS M: This better be good, buster.

TILNEY (*insinuatingly*): Your pa home?

MISS M: Writing some asshole sermon is all. So... do I get to date you at the Prom or what?

TILNEY: Just as soon as I get out of rehab, hon.

MISS M: Fuckin' *A*!

(They embrace as a file of cheerleaders marches behind. Profiles in all newspapers, Amis wins Oscar etc.)

Warballs

"Are you sitting comfortably? Well you should be. After 11 September, the world has taken time to chill out, appreciate the joys of staying in with a bottle of wine and a few chums, rather than perch on a barstool in a sterile wine bar. The hottest sellers in London aren't designer handbags, but Playstation 2s and Malo faux-fur cushions."

— Fashion feature in *Loaded*.

"Hello from the House Doctor! What an eventful past 12 months it has been for all of us. With the tragedies of 11 September and the violence in the Middle East, it has forced many of us to rethink our lives. As a result, you might have decided that selling your home and moving on is the solution, or maybe you are simply looking for a more pleasant way to enjoy the things that you have... Stay tuned for the *House Doctor*, series five – which will air early June on channel 5 – along with my new book *Instant Makeovers* which I am pleased to say is my best yet!"

— mailing from TV's "house doctor" Ann Maurice.

"Few people can have been left untouched by the events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath. The human tragedy that unfolded in the United States and subsequently in Afghanistan resulted in consequences that will have been felt by chemical engineers everywhere..."

— Annual Review of the Institution of Chemical Engineers.

"Life is 'too short' to put off buying that dream yacht... Since 11 September and the terrorist attacks on America, potential dream boat buyers are no longer: instead they *are* dream boat buyers!"

— *Yachting Monthly*.

Pseuds Corner

...instead of zooming off into the distance, the eye is startlingly arrested at what it encounters at the bifurcation of the V – the model's scrotum.

It is an affront that, hitherto, only [Lucian] Freud could risk – as he did, most aggressively, with the penis of Leigh Bowery in 1992, though he has been toying with such parts for a quarter of a century – and the scrotum's raw and reddish tinge enhances its immediate visibility in the half-acre of white paint that surrounds it, in exactly the same way as the tiny peasant in the red bonnet is the most visible point in the grey-green late landscapes of Corot.

BRIAN SEWELL, reviewing an exhibition by Clive Smith, Evening Standard

I love them [his daughters Cecile and Hermione] to bits. We need to celebrate fatherhood. It's cool to be with our children. Being a dad is the new black.

LAURENCE LLEWELYN-BOWEN in a press release recently sent by the Ferrari Press Agency to newspapers

The masterful evocation of an entire social structure through the antics of a few exotic characters imprisoned in a supremely artificial environment reminds me of the way in which Alexander Solzhenitsyn views Soviet Russia through the lens of life in a prison camp for scientists and intellectuals in his 1968 novel The First Circle.

NICK FOULKES admires the DVD of 'Are Your Being Served', Mail On Sunday

The moment Ivo was born, he instantly leapt above getting into Oxford on my list of Best Things That Have Ever Happened To Me, ahead of getting my first novel published and being seduced by an older woman on a beach in Greece.

JAMES DELINGPOLE on 'Am I a good enough dad?', Evening Standard

'Beyond the physics of Queueing'

Title of the Sir Edward Youde Memorial Fund Visiting Professorship Scheme Public Lecture delivered at the University of Hong Kong by Professor Richard C. Larson

Defeat felt like a death in the family and you're left with numbness. I was with a very close friend that night and we went home in total silence; it seemed like the longest journey. I actually went and walked the streets of Islington. I had no idea what to do with myself.

Radio One DJ NICK DOHERTY remembers the trauma of Euro-96, Guardian

Pseuds Corporate

After almost 300 years, Sir Christopher finally gets the surroundings his masterpiece deserves.

Standard Life Investments hoarding erected on the building site for the new Juxon House, adjacent to St Paul's Cathedral.

CONTRIBUTORS: Julia Rosenthal, Mark Jagasia, Fiona Nicholson, Simon and Hayley, Peter Smith, Herbie May and Ann Jones, Tony Kench

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

TALKING CRAPITA

IT IS not every day that executives from the companies reaping the benefit of partnerships with the "new" Labour government are exposed to public scrutiny. So admirers of one of the most successful of these firms, Capita (aka Crapita), should study the Commons education committee's recent report on individual learning accounts (ILAs).

Eye readers will recall that the ILA scheme, a pride and joy of "new" Labour, had to be closed last November when it emerged that it was being cheated out of millions in taxpayers' money by "unscrupulous providers". No one knows exactly how much was ripped off in this way, though the committee said the scheme cost taxpayers £60m more than was originally estimated.

The scheme, like much else in New Labourland, was "contracted out" by the education and skills department (a government body) to Crapita. The man in charge of the scheme at Crapita was Paddy Doyle, the group's operations director. Doyle had an uncomfortable time when he appeared with his acolytes in front of the committee last February.

Paddy Doyle: Is he really worth another £3 million?

MPs wanted to know how and why the "providers" of the learning accounts were not vetted so that the fraud they eventually engaged in could have been anticipated. Mr Doyle's answer, constantly repeated, was that the process of becoming a provider needed to be simplified to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.

He admitted another reason in answer to Tory MP John Baron, who asked about a possible conflict of interest. "If you mean," said Doyle, "that as a conflict of interest, in terms of the more people who entered the scheme the more we got paid, yes… there is a volume-related element to the contract."

Committee chairman Barry Sheerman asked Doyle: "I see from your own report that you have won the contract to do the Criminal Records Bureau. For goodness sake! If you cannot get the security right on an Individual Learning Account, which is relatively modest compared to criminal records, we will be worried, will we not, as to who is going to be accessing the criminal record system?"

Doyle replied: "The security that is required around the criminal records bureau contract is a far higher level than was ever asked for here." The questioning continued:

Q: *But a lot of housing benefit fraud is by ordinary people taking a main chance to make a bit of money. It must have crossed your mind to say at some time: "Minister, all our experience points to the fact that this is full of holes and open to fraud".*

A: *In the early parts of the scheme and when we bid for this contract, I do not believe it crossed our minds.*

Kerry Pollard (St Albans, Lab) tried again, a little later on:

Q: *From your experience, would you suggest that you should have been saying to the minister: "Minister, with a 30-page form for housing benefit, we have immense fraud, so with a one-page form (for individual learning accounts) we will have massive fraud. You are barmy if you put this scheme in." Why where you not saying that at the beginning of the piece?*

A: *I do not think we believed that was the case.*

Questioned again and again as to how his firm had failed to institute any checks at all on the providers to the scheme nor even any authentication as to whether or not the training they were meant to be providing was in fact provided, Mr Doyle stuttered and prevaricated and could give no credible answer. Neither could his acolytes, including Denise Metcalfe, who joined Crapita from the department for education.

Mr Doyle was not, however, remotely embarrassed by his execrable performance, nor about his pay package from Crapita of £337,000 a year. Less than two months after appearing before the committee he cashed in bonus share options worth another £3.3m.

BANKING ON JUSTICE

FREE-marketeers in financial services pretend they understand the case for ombudsmen to whom ordinary punters can take their grievances, but they are inclined to be irritated if and when the ombudsmen get too big for their boots.

Eye readers will recall the fury with which big pensions lawyers (and companies) greeted the determinations of former pensions ombudsman Dr Julian Farrand, who had an annoying habit of distinguishing between the interests of pensioners and those of the companies for whom they worked.

A milder but similar hostility seems to be developing among big companies and banks to the new financial ombudsman, who recently took over the powers of six separate financial ombudsmen.

Some of this hostility arises from the complex problem of so-called "dual" variable interest rates charged on mortgages. In the increasing competition for mortgages that followed the "demutualisation" of the former building societies – Halifax, Abbey National, Cheltenham & Gloucester, etc – several lenders introduced two variable mortgage rates, one higher than the other. Not all borrowers were allowed to transfer to the lower rate.

The ombudsman was approached by some of these borrowers who claimed they should be charged the lower rate. The ombudsman found for the complainants in three separate cases. Halifax, HSBC and the Nationwide had to pay compensation. The Nationwide, still a mutually-owned society, promptly agreed to pay compensation automatically to all other customers in a similar position at a cost of some £90m, but the Halifax (whose top executives are seeking a new multi-million pound bonus scheme) insisted that anyone who felt wronged should take up their case individually.

At the same time, a dispute arose over the rates of interest paid on savings accounts. Some ISAs paid higher rates than the former TESSAs The ombudsman received complaints that clients of banks and building societies were being paid rates on TESSAs that were unfairly low. In general, the ombudsman agreed.

The decisions on these two issues infuriated many banks and building societies whose executives cast around for a way to teach the ombudsman a lesson. One result has been the listing of a judicial review into the case of the Norwich & Peterborough Building Society v the Financial Ombudsman Service in which the ombudsman's decisions on TESSAs will be subject to rigorous judicial scrutiny, at considerable cost and nuisance to the ombudsman. It is widely believed that the Norwich and Peterborough will not have to bear the full cost of the case without some generous help from their bigger and wealthier fellow lenders.

AUTISM

POINTING TO AN EPIDEMIC?

A STAGGERING 1 in 86 primary school children has autism, says a National Autistic Society (NAS) survey. This alarming figure, double the official estimate, suggests Britain is indeed experiencing an autism epidemic. Rates in primary schools appear to be three times higher than in secondary schools; and this will fuel parents' fears about the MMR, the triple mumps, measles and rubella vaccine. It was introduced in 1988 when the autism rate was around one in 2,200.

The NAS surveyed schools in Birmingham, Cardiff, Nottingham, north London and Nottinghamshire; and its findings suggest previously unrecognised consequences for education authorities and social services. The government urgently needs to find out what is happening to these children, but last weekend it was still reluctant to accept the evidence. A spokesman said it was still unclear if there was a real rise in autism or simply greater awareness of it.

Meanwhile a scientific paper by the team at the Royal Free hospital in north London which has been looking at children with autism and bowel disease went largely unnoticed in the media. Maybe this was because it didn't mention measles or MMR. But it did provide another clue to what might be happening to some of the children. The team, led by consultant paediatric gastroenterologist Simon Murch, confirmed what many had long believed: the autistic children are suffering an autoimmune gut disease. In other words, for some reason the immune system had turned on itself to cause tissue injury.

The team established this by examining intestinal samples from 25 autistic children, with 18 "normal" control samples and 11 from children with a different stomach disease and five with cerebral palsy. The autistic children had far greater numbers of "T" immune cells at the site of the inflammation. But most strikingly researchers found that an antibody in the circulating blood of the autistic children was binding to the intestinal wall in exactly the same way and place as chemicals associated with the gut inflammation – suggesting an auto-immune reaction.

The paper raises the question of whether this gut involvement in autism causes or exacerbates the type of autism these children seem to be suffering. Autoimmune disease tends to run in families – a genetic weakness that often requires a trigger like a virus to start it off. Although the latest paper does not say so, it is known from previous work by the Royal Free team under Dr Andrew Wakefield that the measles virus has been found in most of these autistic children. Could that be the "environmental trigger" for the auto-immune disease?

One man who thinks the answer to both questions is yes is Jonathan Harris, a father of six. His two eldest children, Ashley, 16, and Laura, 14, had single measles vaccines and are well and "normal". The two middle children, Thomas, aged 11, and Oliver, 8, had the MMR vaccine and both declined into autism and bowel problems. No wonder Mr Harris and his wife have declined MMR for the two youngest children, Maisie, 4, and Alistair, 3.

In the meantime Direct Health 2000, the biggest UK provider of single jab alternatives to MMR, is receiving extraordinary attention from the department of health. Its clinics have been visited four times in as many weeks by inspectors from the new National Care Standards Commission.

Direct Health has now given single jabs to about 28,000 children and reports – contrary to government suggestions – 97 percent success rate in completion of the single jabs course. Instead of appearing to harass the company, perhaps the commission should ask to compare the health of those 28,000 with a similar sample of children who have had MMR.

● *Don't miss MMR: THE STORY SO FAR, our special report on the vaccine controversy, on sale now £1.50.*

MUST CHAI HARDER

WHEN the *Eye* reported on a scandalous dossier of neglect at Lynde House, a £600-a-week old people's home in west London run by Westminster Health Care, the company said it was running a "high quality" home and welcomed the announcement of an independent investigation.

However, now that the inspection by Mary McLaren is complete, neither the company nor the former Kingston and Richmond health authority (which should have been monitoring the home and stepped in to stop the suffering) has been happy to release the report to relatives of the victims.

Could this be because it damns both Westminster Health Care, which at the time was headed by Labour donor and private health guru Chai Patel, and the health authority, which despite endless complaints repeatedly gave the home a clean bill of health?

In fact frail elderly patients were left for hours in their own waste; they suffered preventable falls and unexplained bruising; and were left motionless for so long they developed pressure sores. There were also delay in getting medical attention; alarm bells went unanswered; and some residents went unshowered or bathed for weeks.

Chai Patel

Perhaps aware of the costly claims for damages that could arise from lack of care or neglect, both the company and health officials have been going through McLaren's report line by line. And two weeks ago they met her to contest some of her findings. The delay in releasing the report is apparently because McLaren is rewriting some of it to accommodate some of their protests.

However, the *Eye* has been passed copies of letters the inspector sent in response to relatives and friends who had catalogued their complaints. The letters make grim reading and raise serious concerns about shocking standards of care at the home that went unchecked for up to four years until local Lib Dem MP Dr Vincent Cable took up the families' cause.

The letters reveal a consistent pattern of squalor and suffering. And Dr Cable said: "The preliminary reports indicate that the families were justified in their anger at the dreadful treatment of their relatives that the home had sought to deny for so long. I now hope that those found to be responsible and those who failed to uncover the problems will face appropriate action."

Paul Jarman, a spokesman for Westminster Health Care, said that while it disputed some of the inspector's findings, it did accept there were some failures and problems with management at the home. Westminster Health Care has since worked with the new National Care Standards Commission to rectify them, he said, including adopting new management and procedures in last January. He declined to discuss the cases in detail until after the full report was published.

Despite repeated calls to Kingston Primary Care Trust, formerly the health authority, no one was available to discuss the plight of Lynde House's residents. But the delay in publication of the report has proved rather convenient for Chai Patel. He off-loaded Lynde House along with the rest of Westminster Health Care's "senior living", the division providing care for elderly, on 30 April in a buy-out, backed by funding from venture capitalists 3i.

VAT a disaster!

FIVE years ago *Eye* 933 exposed the big accountancy conglomerate Ernst & Young for a tax fiddle involving hospital trusts who were its clients. The fiddle, involving a roundabout route via the tax haven of Jersey, avoided paying VAT on the purchase of hospital equipment.

The government intervened after the *Eye* article, and ordered the trusts to stop the fiddle. Now, however, comes news that the tax avoidance specialists at Ernst & Young have been at it again – with disastrous results for them and their clients.

A VAT tribunal has ruled out yet another Ernst & Young VAT avoidance scheme, this time on behalf of another of its medical clients, the private health assurance firm BUPA. The scam involved the advance purchase of millions of pounds worth of drugs from a stooge company that was not even entitled to sell them. This "saved" BUPA (which constantly boasts of the services it provides the NHS at the cost of the taxpayer) some £35m a year in VAT.

The tribunal mocked the transparency of the scheme and ruled it out. It observed: "The conclusion that the arrangements were put in place for tax avoidance and no other reason became irresistible." The principle that any scheme that has no commercial purpose except to avoid tax should be disallowed is known as the Halifax principle, following a similar ruling a year ago in a scam involving the Halifax. And who put the Halifax up to the advantages of that scam? Ernst & Young!

Charles Koppel

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

SOME people enjoy football, others make money out of it. A good example of the conflict between the two groups is the current crisis at Wimbledon football club.

The following people want the team to return to its old ground at Plough Lane, Merton.

The fans. Every single poll and survey indicates massive and militant support for Plough Lane.

The public. A recent ICM poll found 83 percent of the public in the area arguing for Plough Lane. Enthusiastic fans have commissioned a report that recommends the redevelopment of Plough Lane with a stadium that will take 18,000 supporters.

Merton council. It has voted unanimously in favour of a reconstructed Plough Lane.

Plus the MP (Roger Casale). The Football League. The former manager Terry Burton (now sacked for daring to express his view that Wimbledon football should stay in or near Wimbledon). And the players who, despite the controversy, have kept the club high in the first division.

The following people want to move the club to a new ground some 60 miles away to Milton Keynes.

The club chairman, Charles Koppel, a South African who describes himself as a Spurs supporter. His legal adviser, Dan Tench of London solicitors Olswang. And the majority shareholder in the club, Kjell Inge Roekke, a Norwegian multi-millionaire.

So why go to Milton Keynes when your supporters are in south London? The chief attraction for businessmen in Milton Keynes is that if Wimbledon FC moves there, planning permission for a huge sports centre and "superbowl" might be possible. Otherwise planning permission is unthinkable. The chief attraction of Milton Keynes for Mr Koppel, Mr Roekke and their supporters is a brand new stadium they wouldn't have to pay for.

LOCKERBIE: LIBYA'S DILEMMA

AN awkward dilemma confronts the government of Libya as it wrestles with writs from American lawyers demanding billions of pounds compensation for the victims of the Lockerbie bombing.

Abdulbasset Al Megrahi

On the one hand, Gadaffi and Co want to settle the matter so that sanctions against Libya can be lifted and they can reenter the profitable world of trade with the US. On the other, the evidence mounts that the conviction by a Scottish court of their so-called "agent", Abdulbasset Ali Mohammed Al Megrahi, was a ridiculous miscarriage of justice, and that Libya and Megrahi had nothing to do with Lockerbie.

The dilemma is made worse by publication and circulation of the report of the Organisation of African Unity commission of jurists on the Lockerbie case. The report follows the line of the UN observer to the Scottish trial, Dr Hans Koechler (see *Eye* 1052), and concludes in even more robust terms that Megrahi's conviction was absurd.

This attack on the Lockerbie verdict needs to be contrasted with the hectic negotiations for payment of "compensation" by the Libyan government to the families of the Lockerbie dead. For if Megrahi and Libya had nothing to do with the bombing, why should Libya pay compensation?

Number crunching

£2.4 billion

COMPENSATION offered by Libyan government to families of Lockerbie victims.

$24 billion

COST to Libya of international sanctions which could be lifted following compensation pay out.

In the City

THE Saudi government continues to be haunted by allegations that prominent business figures in the kingdom have in the past had links with Osama bin Laden – allegations which it and those named (usually by American investigators, especially since 11 September) rush to denounce as untrue and unfair.

Despite these fervent denials the US-driven hunt to track down the financiers of Al-Qaeda has generated a number of public and private lists on which appear a number of well-known Saudi names.

This creates a major problem for the Saudis who are often unwilling to take the action required – usually freezing assets and handing over bank account details – because to do so would be to admit the unthinkable: that Uncle Sam's greatest ally/dependant in the Gulf is not unanimous in its opposition to Osama or other Islamic radicals. This may raise the fear that Saudi Arabia could go the same way as the Shah of Iran, another supposedly impregnable American ally.

But it is also a problem for Washington, which does not want to alienate the Saudis by publicly targeting those close to the rulers.

An example of the unjustified embarrassment the Osama shadow can create has emerged in reports from Luxembourg where it appears the local banking authorities last year developed an interest in a transaction involving a company connected to Saudi billionaire businessman, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi. The Luxembourg authorities were attracted by an attempted transfer to a local bank by a French lawyer of around £3m for a company associated with Al-Amoudi's Midroc group.

Al-Amoudi is reputedly the biggest private investor in Africa, especially Ethiopia, where he was born. He also has interests in Britain including a home here. Al-Amoudi has in the past done business with and through Barclays which he is currently suing for £15m. That relationship has in part been established through Middle East Capital Group of Guernsey, where both Barclays and the Saudi banker Khalid bin Mahfouz are shareholders. The ties between Al-Amoudi and bin Mahfouz may explain the interest by investigators.

Any link with bin Laden or his terrorist friends was immediately denied by Al-Amoudi's lawyers in relation to the Luxembourg transaction. Sadly this is the second time the Saudi billionaire has had to make clear that he is no friend or supporter of Osama. Back in 1999 he had to deny a US newspaper report that suggested he was involved in financing terrorism. Al-Amoudi declared that he was unalterably opposed to terrorism and had no knowledge of money transfers to bin Laden.

Al-Amoudi has always been close to bin Mahfouz whose name has been mentioned by French and American sources for alleged links to bin Laden, especially through the family-owned National Commercial Bank. Bin Mahfouz was forced out of NCB after a rift with the Saudi royals in which the bin Laden allegations may have played a role.

He or his family have been associated with a number of charities suspected of being conduits for money to Al-Qaeda. The charity commission has frozen the bank accounts of the London-based International Development Foundation. Bin Mahfouz was also a major donor to the Saudi-based Muwafaq Foundation charity which the US treasury described as an Al-Qaeda front. His son was on the board of Blessed Relief, another Islamic charity, which has been targeted by the US. But despite such allegations the US government has not placed bin Mahfouz on its hit list.

No wonder Mohammed Al-Amoudi feels aggrieved at these repeated and unjustified slurs on his reputation.

RODDAM Twiss, one of the longest running promoters – from his east London council flat – of the supposed riches available from the weird and wonderful world of exotic high yield investments (private placement programmes, medium term notes, standby letters of credit, prime bank guarantees, etc), has been arrested and charged with fraud by the Serious Farce Office.

Twiss faces nine charges involving $3m taken from investors by his Grosvenor Trust operation between 1997 and 1999. He is charged with conspiracy to defraud investors induced by dishonest representations to invest in a high yield investment scheme whereas there was no intention to invest in such schemes. He is also charged with theft from high-yield investment schemes purported to be run by Grosvenor Trust. Also named in the charges, which Twiss denies, is Emile Coury who has not yet been arrested.

The son of a former admiral and Black Rod of the House of Lords, his colourful career was detailed two years ago in *Eye* 1006. Twiss is expected to stand trial next year.

AS THE Andersen criminal trial unwinds in Houston, partners of the world's most pliable auditors in London will be feeling increasingly queasy. Should Andersen be convicted of obstructing justice through shredding Enron documents, the once mighty partnership may be unable to buy off Enron investors who have sued. They have already seen their hopes of a $1bn payout by Andersen thwarted by the US partnership's implosion as clients flee. A criminal conviction would put Andersen out of business completely.

As part of the prosecution case is that Enron documents were destroyed in London last year ahead of the Securities & Exchange Commission probe, this could put the London partners firmly in the investors' sights. Which would be very unwelcome news as Andersen UK is understood to be an old fashioned jointly and severally liable-style partnership, not the new-fangled limited liability version. That could make all the UK partners liable for any award necessary to buy off the pursuing Enron creditors.

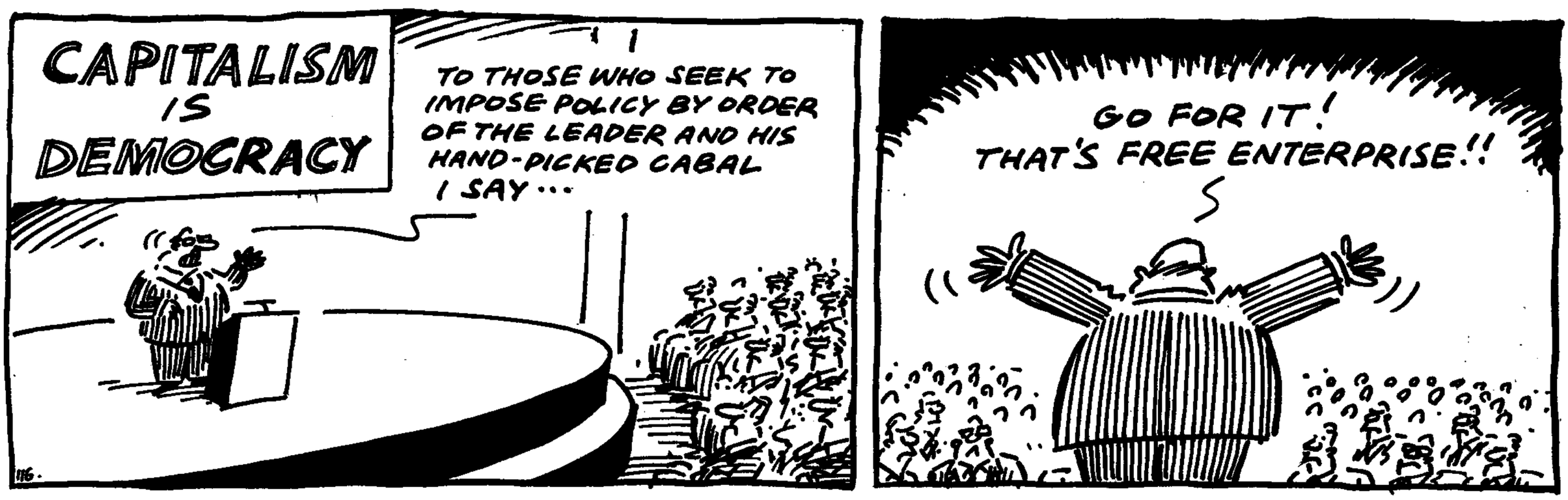
Andersen London maintains there was no inappropriate document destruction on its premises and if there was it was done by Houston visitors. But that is unlikely to be enough to escape legal retribution. Especially as accountancy experts point out that Andersen had already pushed the boundaries of the envelope with a "clean up the file" approach to document retention/destruction that far exceeded other audit firms.

All of which suggests that even the planned merger of the UK business with Deloitte & Touche may not be the end of the Enron problem for senior partner John Ormerod and his colleagues. Especially as undoubtedly D&T will insist on being ringfenced from the Enron inheritance.

THE decision of an appeal tribunal to slash the fine imposed on Coopers & Lybrand for failing to detect and stop Nick Leeson's fraud at Barings sends a strange message to those who support self-regulation of bean counters.

Coopers saw the £1m fine imposed by the joint disciplinary scheme cut to just £250,000 – a reward for the millions PricewaterhouseCoopers spent on the case. PwC was desperate to ensure the appeal verdict did not come before it had made a settlement with the Barings liquidators. As a sop a costs order was increased to £635,000.

Somehow the monumental failure at Barings is seen as far less than that with Cap'n Bob, where Coopers was fined a more appropriate £1.2m with £2.1m in costs. For this it may have in part to thank the chairman of the appeal hearing, Sir Oliver Popplewell, who now assures us he was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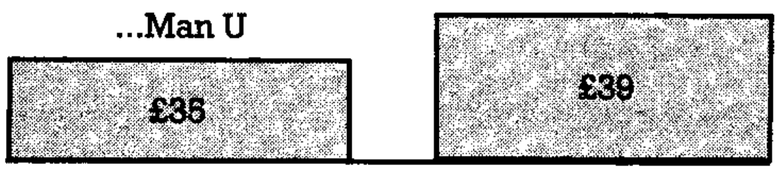

never for one moment taken in by Jonathan Aitken in the libel trial before the Tory MP's perjury was exposed. The trial – which the Guardian and Granada TV feared they were losing before a less than sympathetic Popplewell – then collapsed.

"Well, that's just uncanny! How did you know that we formed the company in the early '70s?"

INVESTIGATORS examining RBG Resources, the metal trader run by Viren Rastogi whose offices and home were raided by the SFO earlier this month, are drawing parallels with another SFO investigation – that into fugitive metal trader Madhav Patel. Patel's Solo Industries group collapsed in 1998 and the banks could be owed as much as £300m on transactions many of which turned out to be phoney.

Rastogi, who hired former Labour minister Jack Cunningham, was arrested but released without charge. A lengthy investigation is now expected.

RGB's bankers have suspicions that there could be a Solo style lack of substance to much of the RBG trading on which they have advanced more than £250m. Such was the sensitivity of RBG's finances that the raids were timed to wait on a decision by the group's main banker WestDeutsche Landesbank to pull the plug. It was feared that any precipitous action by the City Police, who had been monitoring the situation for some time, might have prompted the company's collapse. Now inquiries by the SFO and the administrator appointed by WLB will proceed in parallel.

Meanwhile it is no coincidence that the criminal investigation is being undertaken by the same team involved in the Patel inquiry. Patel himself has disappeared, possibly into Iran or Central Asia. Two of his underlings will be tried in his absence.

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Advertisement, Financial Gazette (Zimbabwe)

EYE CROSSWORD 209

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 24 May 2002.

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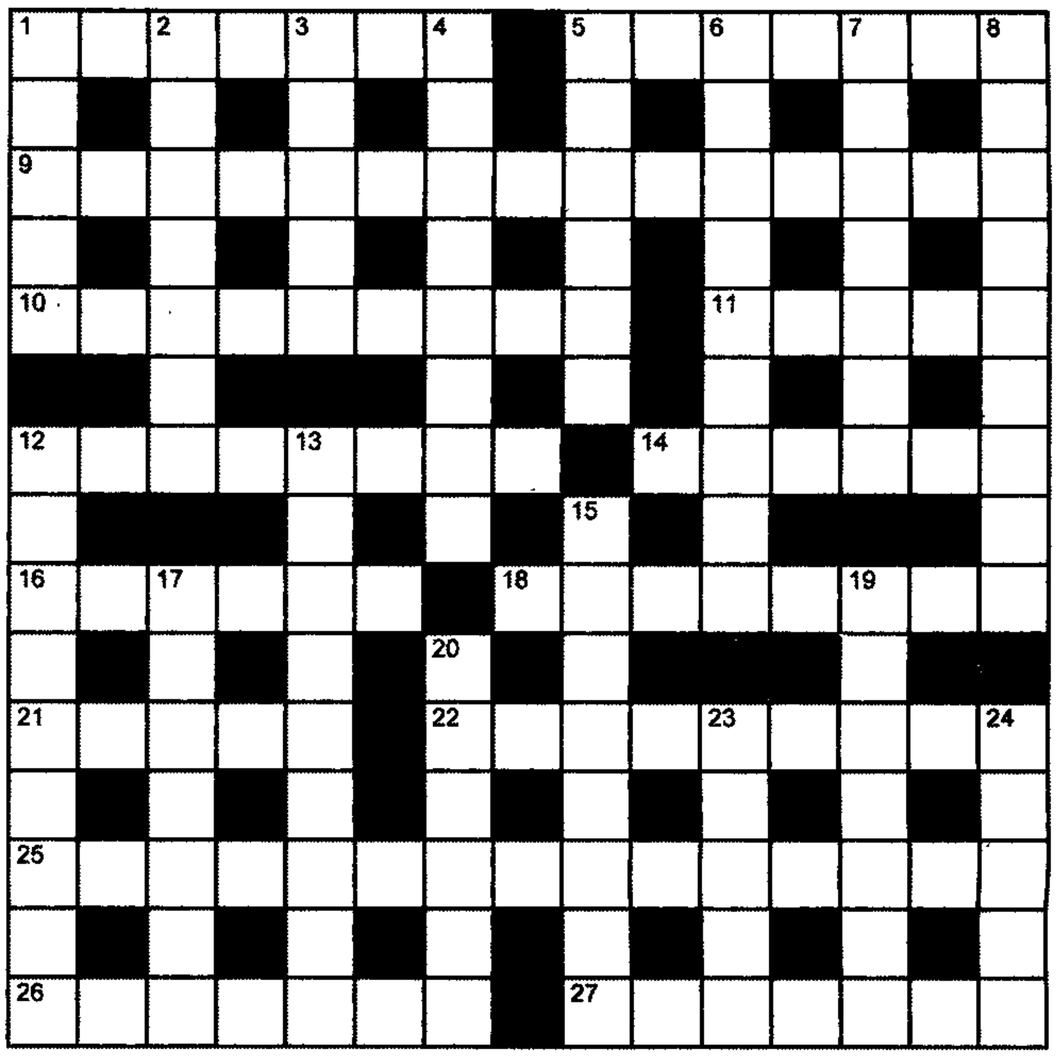


ACROSS

1 Hoist to Dicky's DIY satisfaction (4-3)

5 Very 'Brenda' in the sack: subdued (7)

9/12ac. Not much of a life when you're supposedly looked after by the NHS? (4,3,6,2,3,5)

10 Snotty type of salesman guzzling flipping foreign plonk (9)

11 Tuck in shirt-tail between each period of excitement (3,2)

12 See 9

14 Theatrical piece showing how to behave like the *Titanic* musicians? (4,2)

16 MBE wasted on Roy, sadly lacking in development (6)

18 Harry's school of "lust without great struggle" (8)

21 Application will get you topless lovemaking with Dion's top half (5)

22 In poor taste? Well, that's kids for you (9)

25 Comedian with fashionable chat and spots gets panic attack (9,6)

26 Time-waster, Tony Blair? Extremely — should accept sack (7)

27 Do they run the risk of being unable to see bulls? (7)

DOWN

1 Jack, providing female with pole, flashes (5)

2 Conservative in election likely to get a good licking (4-3)

3 True love: kinky and bizarre (5)

4 Sex (but not bondage) popular in the Sixties (4,4)

5 He thought of being part of Tracey's art — repulsive! (6)

6 Associate "shag" with Guy (9)

7 Note attached to back passage possibly has to be at the right angle for an astronaut (2-5)

8 Abandon electronic sounds and shit (9)

12 Stinking flighty types making definitive *Sooty* series (3,3,3)

13 "Troubled business," our Brian (for one) said (5,4)

15 Heavenly engagement? God – trouble and strife! (8)

17 Spirit of left ditched by deceitful Blair — cad! (7)

19 Town's "whiskey political scandal", so we hear (7)

20 More gaunt as a result of hard-on one suppressed (6)

23 Bush needs local drugs (5)

24 Talk about little Spanish puffs (5)

Crossword 208 winner: GEOFF HAMER

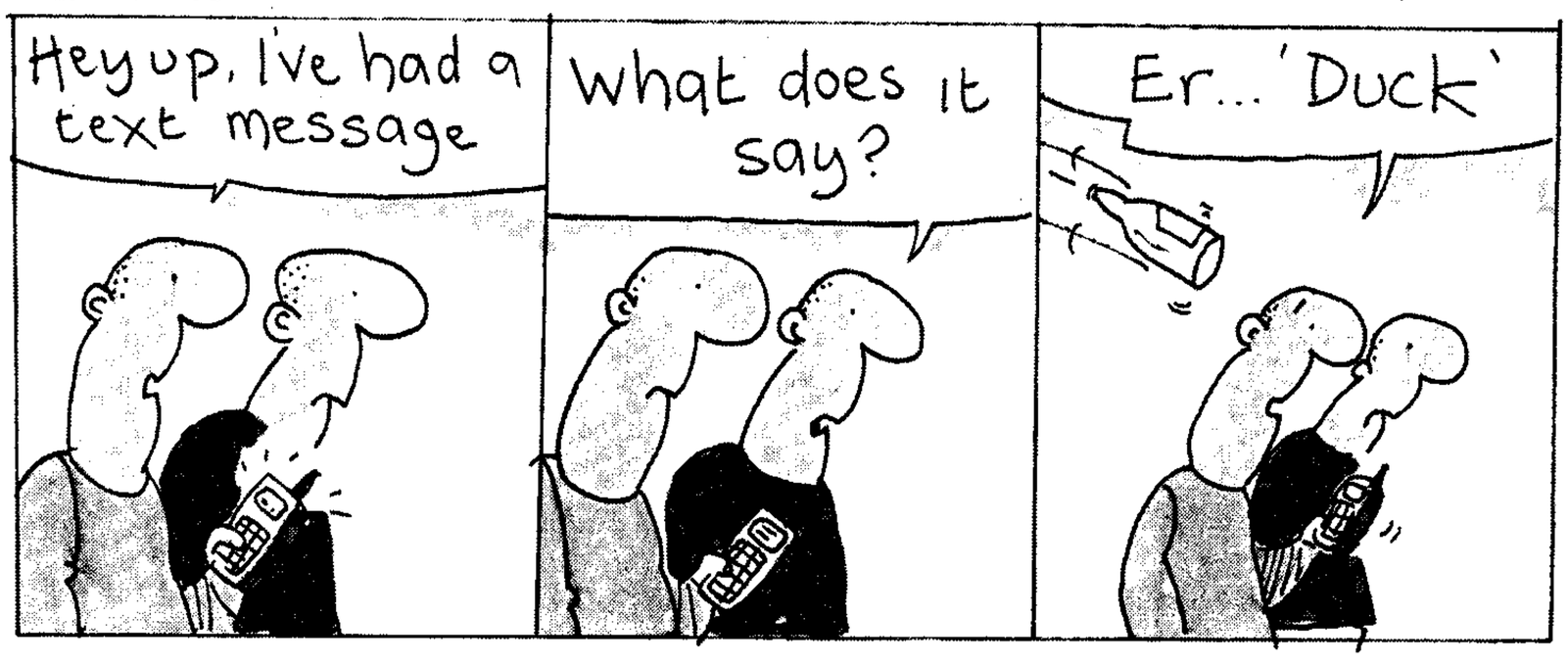
Solution to Crossword 208

ACROSS: 1/10/11 Stating the bleedin' obvious 6 Agin 12 Score draw 13 Regal 14 Indus 16 Mendicant 18 No strings 20 Lasso 22 Blurb 23 Panty line 26 Cocteau 27 Balling 28 SSSI 29 Belly-ached.

DOWN: 1 Sebastian 2 Adenoid 3 Indie 4 Goner 5 Hoodwinks 7 Georgia 8 Nasal 9 Overkill 15 Scrubber 16 Menopause 17 Two-legged 19 Sources 21 Swinish 22 Becks 24 Nobel 25 Yalta.

Yobs

HUSBAND



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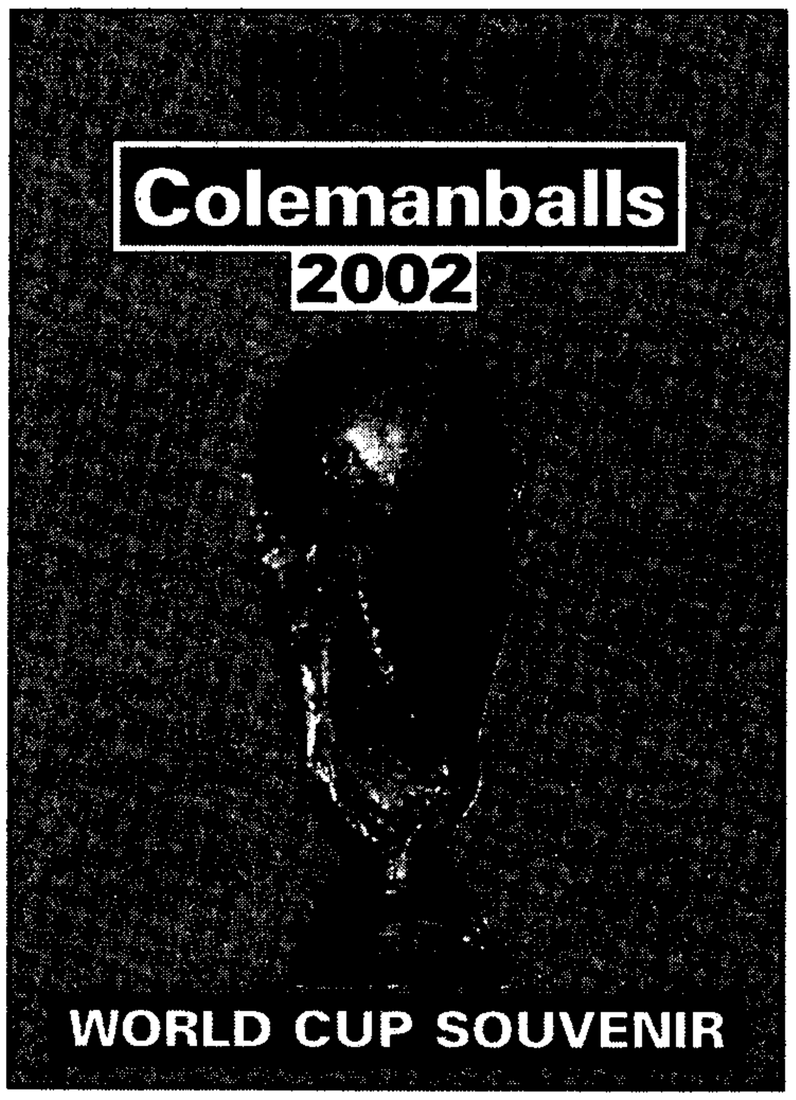

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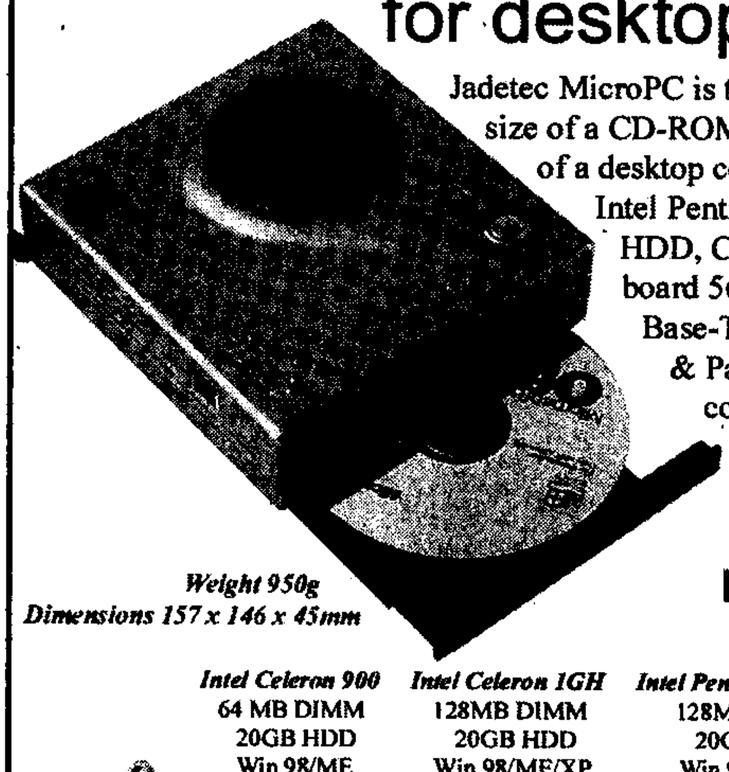

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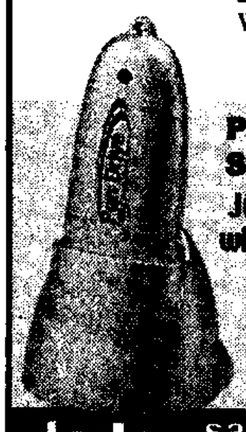

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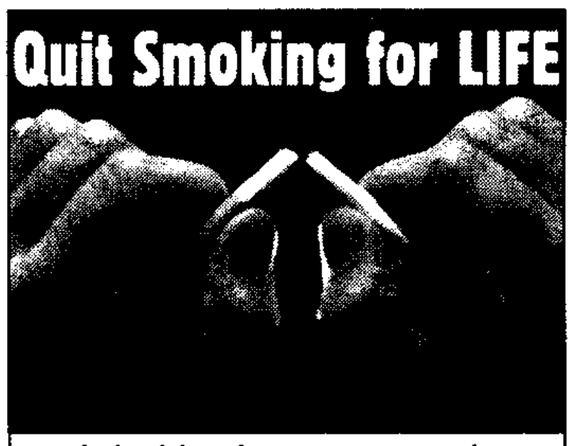

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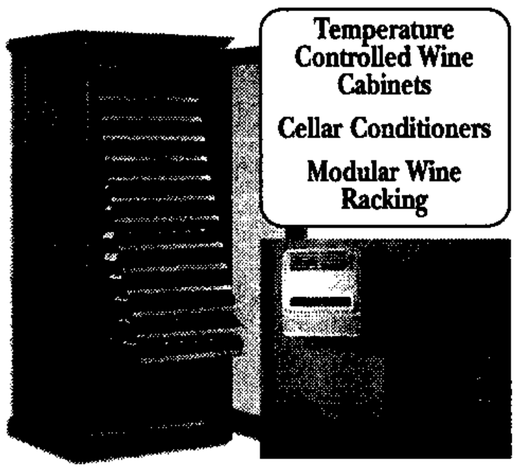

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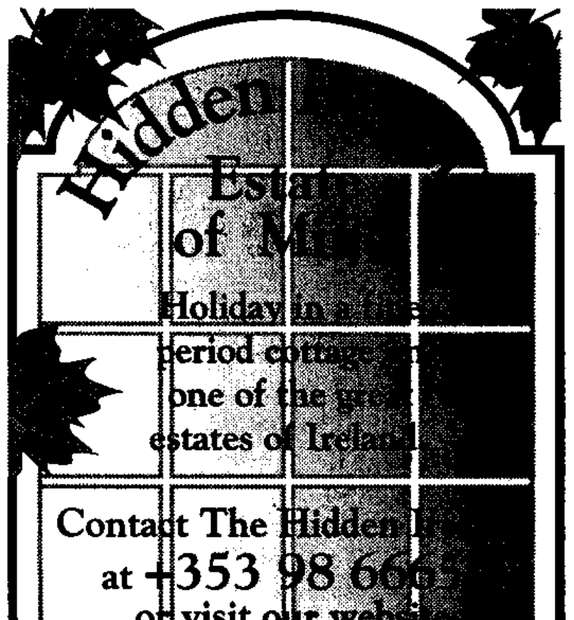

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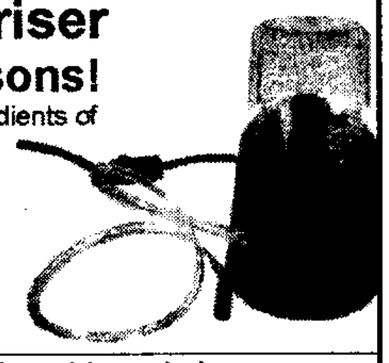

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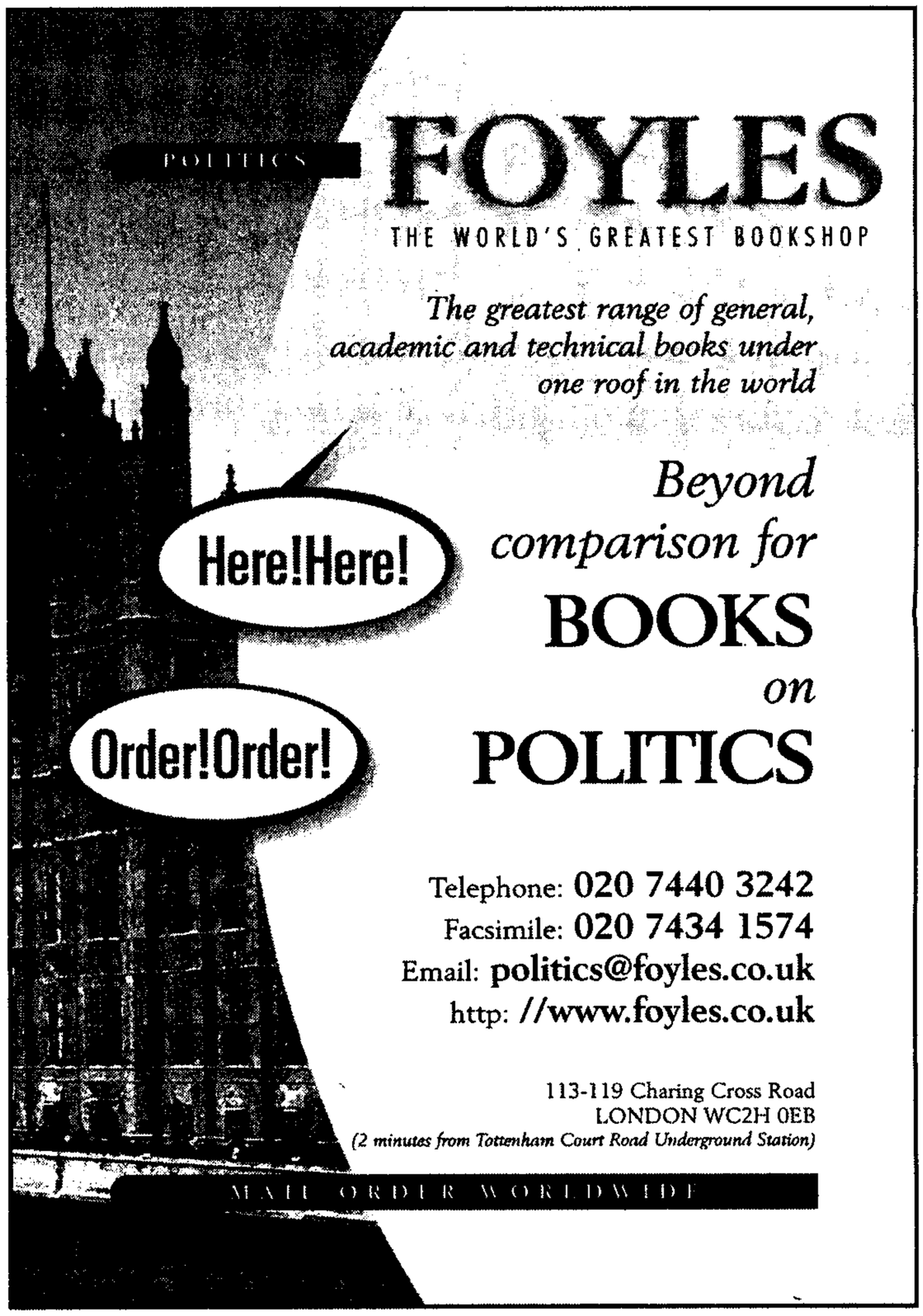

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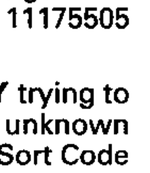

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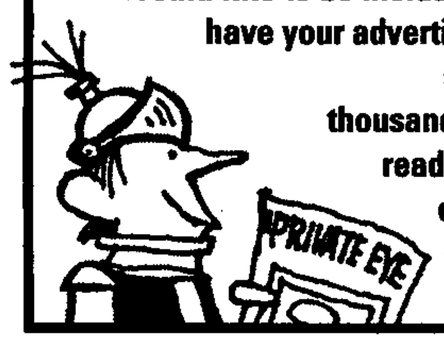

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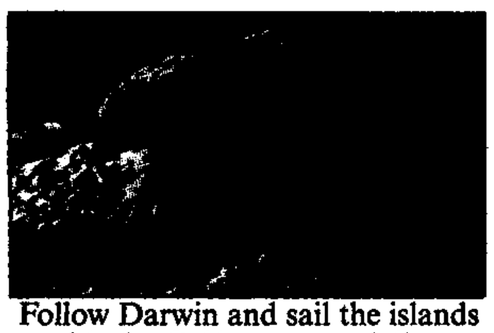

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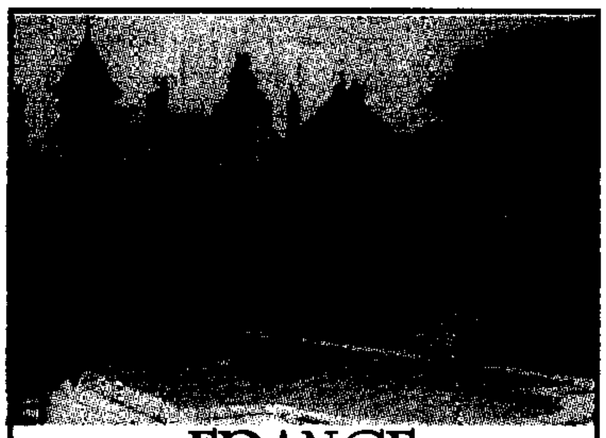

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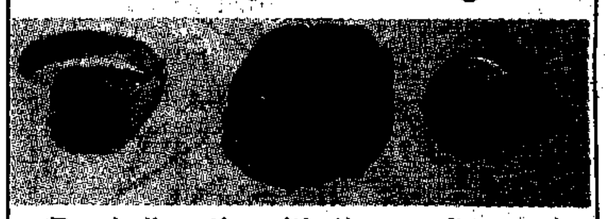

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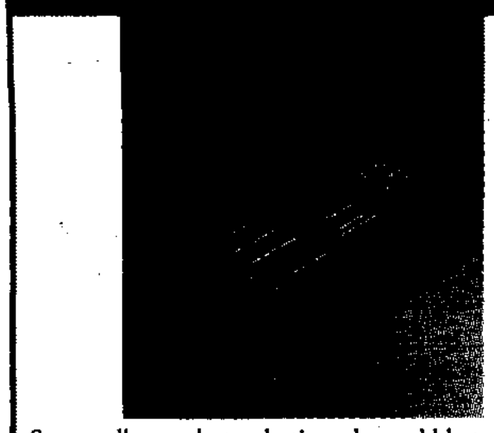

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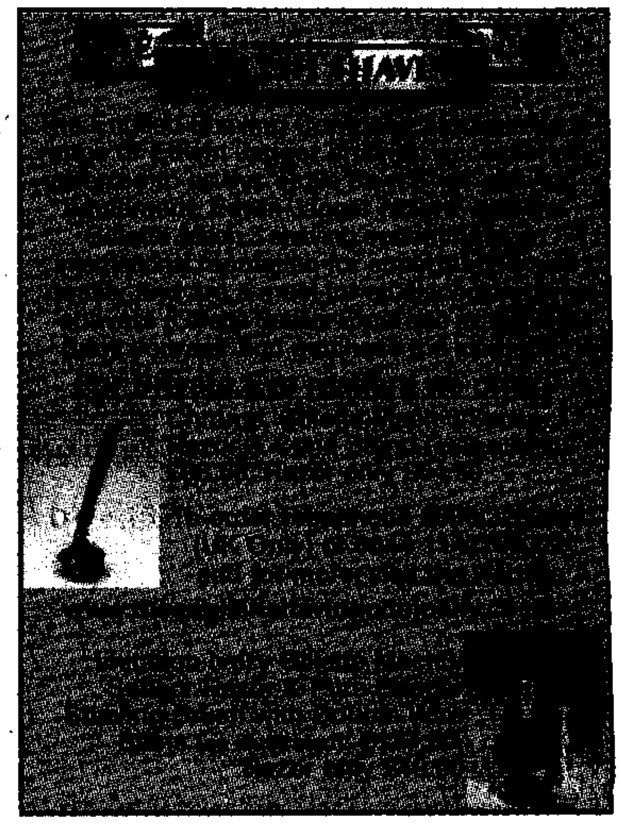

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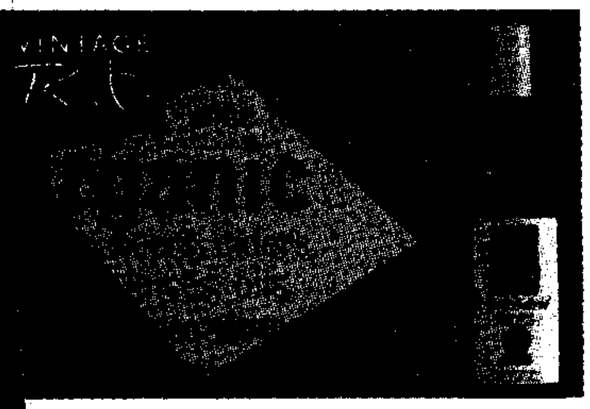

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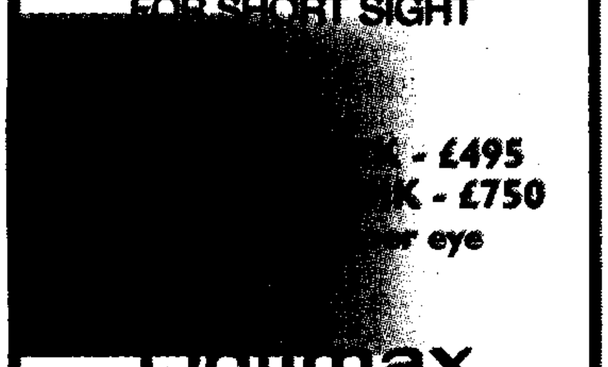

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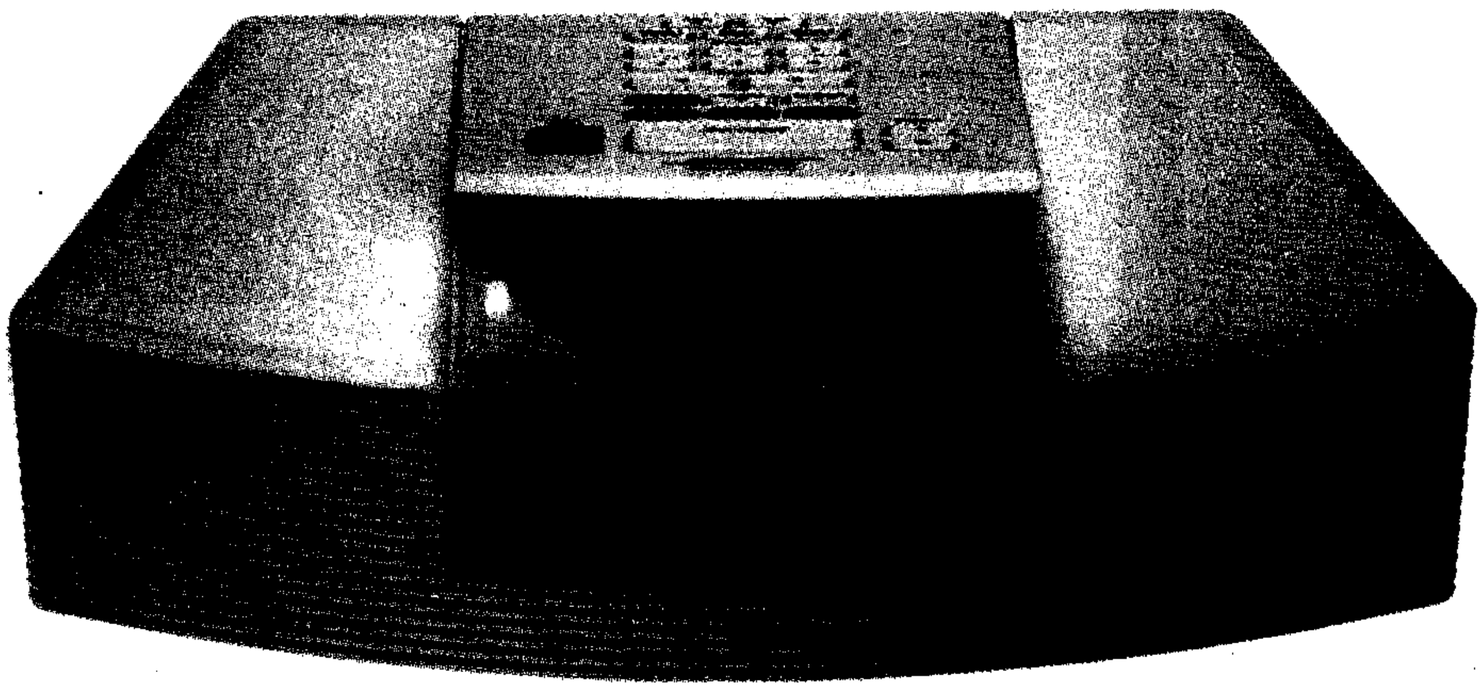

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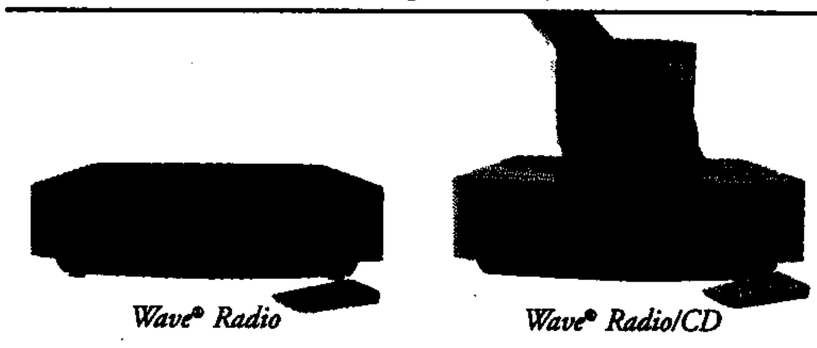

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